

# **Policing the Recession: Unemployment, Social Protest and Law-and-Order in Republican Barcelona, 1930-1936**

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**Policing the Recession: Unemployment, Social Protest and Law-and-Order in Barcelona, 1930-1936**

<sup>^</sup>  
*Republican*  
**Thesis submitted to the University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History by Christopher Ealham**

**Queen Mary and Westfield College  
September 1995**



## ERRATA

Page 13 line 5	For "In one part" read "In part"
Page 22 line 15	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 23 line 3	For "events. like" read "events, like"
Page 26 line 19	For "prescribing" read "proscribing"
Page 26 line 20	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 29 line 11	For "who" read "whose"
Page 36 line 21	For "democratic, alternative" read "democratic alternative"
Page 38 line 7	For "Setmana, Tràgica" read "Setmana Tràgica"
Page 47 line 2	For "double" read "doubled"
Page 53 n.8 line 3	For "negociated" read "negotiated"
Page 62 n.25 line 8	For "Seguís" read "Seguí's"
Page 71 line 3	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 74 line 21	For "via." read "via"
Page 78 line 14	For "compliment" read "complement"
Page 95 line 4	For "Peirós" read "Peiró's"
Page 100 line 27	For "anti-monarchist" read "anti-monarchists"
Page 101 line 5	For "lay day" read "lay down"
Page 104 line 21	For "prestige of" read "prestige"
Page 118 line 12	For "challenged" read "challenges"
Page 124 line 22	For "opt-clauses" read "opt-out clauses"
Page 125 line 3	Delete "grew wider"
Page 126 line 4	For "leasership" read "leadership"
Page 128 line 13	For "evidence that" read "evidence between"
Page 140 line 1	Delete "dead"
Page 141 line 11	For "applicability industrial " read "applicability of industrial"
Page 159 line 22	For "Nacional" read "National"
Page 160 line 25	Delete "unemployed"
Page 175 line 1	For "laboriousness" read "laborious"
Page 191 line 8	For "therefpre" read "therefore"
Page 197 line 24	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 204 line 4	Should read "People's Mayors"
Page 215 line 8	For "exonerating" read "exonerated"
Page 218 line 23	For "Yet few" read "Yet with few"
Page 220 line 22	For "torturous" read "tortuous"
Page 230 line 24	Delete "as"
Page 238 line 9	For "accursed" read "cursed"
Page 244 line 6	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 251 line 5	For "vice" read "vise"
Page 253 line 22	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 258 line 7	For "equanimious" read "harmonious"
Page 258 line 23	For "wolfs" read "wolves"
Page 274 line 4	Replace "explaining" with "attributing"
Page 280 line 13	For "ladenened" read "laden"
Page 283 line 11	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 285 line 19	For "Santa María del Mar" read "Puerto de Santa María"
Page 287 line 3	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 288 line 7	For "given the both" read "given both"
Page 291 lines 4 & 18	For "Santa María del Mar" read "Puerto de Santa María"

'Books and magazines contain generalised notions and only sketch the course of events in the world as best they can: they can never let you have an immediate direct, animated sense of the lives of Tom, Dick or Harry. If you are not able to understand real individuals, you are not able to understand what is universal and general'.

(Antonio Gramsci)

'There is surely no-one in Spain today whose pride in their life exceeds my own; there is no-one less repentant what was their life, the life of a prisoner and convict. This is no surprise in our country! Our country was an open prison. We were all prisoners - there were a few principal gaolers who were never detained, whom I never saw when passing from gaol to gaol, prison to prison. Never did these gaolers - the bishops, the generals, the millionaires, nor any of the rabble that has risen up against popular and proletarian Spain - ever go to prison. Yet the rest of us have all been in gaols and prisons. What was inevitable has happened; the prison, the gaol and the prisoner have risen up against their incarcerators, against those who throughout the course of time have oppressed and judged us. And what has happened will also inevitably follow: that the Spain of the prisoners will defeat the Spain of the gaolers, just as in '93 Republican France defeated the France of the monarchy and the gaolers, with the France of liberties triumphant'.

(Juan García Oliver)

'Macià has tried to make a little Catalonia, whilst we would have made Barcelona the spiritual capital of the world'.

(Buenaventura Durruti)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	5
Map of Barcelona City.....	7
Map of Barcelona Province.....	8
Glossary of Organisations.....	9
INTRODUCTION.....	10
CHAPTER 1: BARCELONA BEFORE THE REPUBLIC.....	13
1.1. The Making Of The Barcelona Working Class.....	13
1.2. Urban Development, Social Change and Popular Culture.....	27
1.3. The Open Wounds of Proletarian Barcelona.....	40
CHAPTER 2: REPUBLICAN BARCELONA.....	51
2.1. The Catalan Republican-Populist Option.....	51
2.2. The Fault Lines of the CNT.....	63
2.3. The New Republican Dawn.....	81
2.4. The CNT and the Republic.....	89
CHAPTER 3: 'THE REPUBLIC OF ORDER'.....	98
3.1. The End of the Catalan Republic.....	98
3.2. The Bourgeoisie and the Republic.....	106
3.3. Power in the Republic.....	107
3.4. The 'Principle of Authority' and the 'Republic of Order'.....	114
3.5. The 'Republic of Order' in the Workplace.....	122
CHAPTER 4: THE BATTLE FOR THE STREETS.....	152
4.1. Autonomous Catalonia.....	152
4.2. 'Las cosas del palacio van despacio': the Unemployed and the Republic.....	159
4.3. Unemployed Self-Help.....	172
4.4. Criminalising the unemployed.....	183
4.5. 'The People' Divides.....	190
4.6. The Spectre of the 'Underclass': the 'Deserving' versus the 'Undeserving' Poor.....	203
CHAPTER 5: 'THE SAME DOG WITH A DIFFERENT COLLAR': THE FAI AND THE REPUBLIC.....	222
5.1. Policing the Crisis.....	222
5.2. The Rise of the FAI.....	233
5.3. Against the Republic.....	249
5.4. 'Revolutionary Gymnastics' and the Cycle of Insurrections.....	260
5.5. Dealing with the Unemployed: <i>la Ley de Vagos y Maleantes</i> .....	273
5.6. 'Death to the Bourgeois Republic'.....	292
CHAPTER 6: THE MILITARISATION OF ANARCHISM.....	301
6.1. The Generalitat and Law-and-Order.....	301
6.2. Militarised Anarchism.....	315
6.3. Funding the CNT.....	320
6.4. Anarchism and Popular Illegality.....	329
6.5. Crime Waves and Moral Panics.....	346
6.6. The Moral Panics Explored.....	357

<b>CHAPTER 7: CLASS CULTURE AND ILLEGALITY.....</b>	<b>370</b>
7.1. 'Criminal Capitalism'.....	370
7.2. The 'Moral Economy' of the Barcelona Proletariat.....	379
7.3. 'Revolutionary Constructivism': the End of the Expropriations?.....	389
7.4. The Discreet Charm of the Republicans.....	405
7.5. An 'Apolitical' Revolution: Anarchism, Revolution and Civil War.....	411
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>415</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>421</b>

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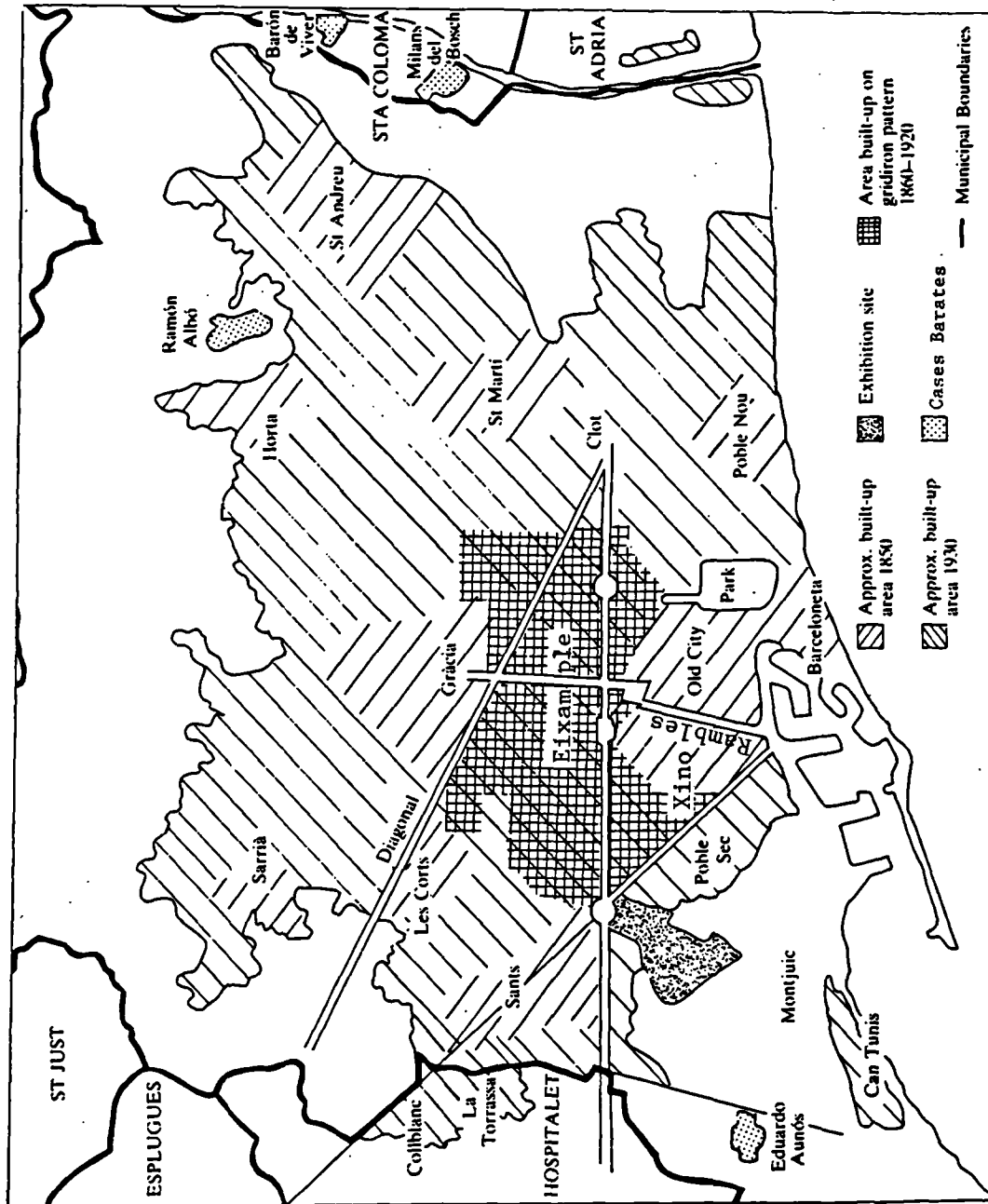
Office archives at the Public Records Office in Kew. Nick Rider loaned me his unpublished Ph.D. thesis and offered constructive suggestions during the early stages of my research, enriching my knowledge of the social history of modern Catalonia considerably in the process: although he would not readily accept my conclusions, he was an important influence on this thesis. I also wish to thank my colleagues at University of Wales Cardiff, particularly Pete Dorey, Graeme Garrard, Claire Gorrara, David Hanley, Charles Kelley and Nick Parsons. Claire Smith helped me prepare the maps.

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The impact of Paul Preston is even more considerable. After heightening my initial interest in Spanish labour struggles, he went on to provide unflagging supervision of my doctoral thesis in a reasoned and balanced manner.

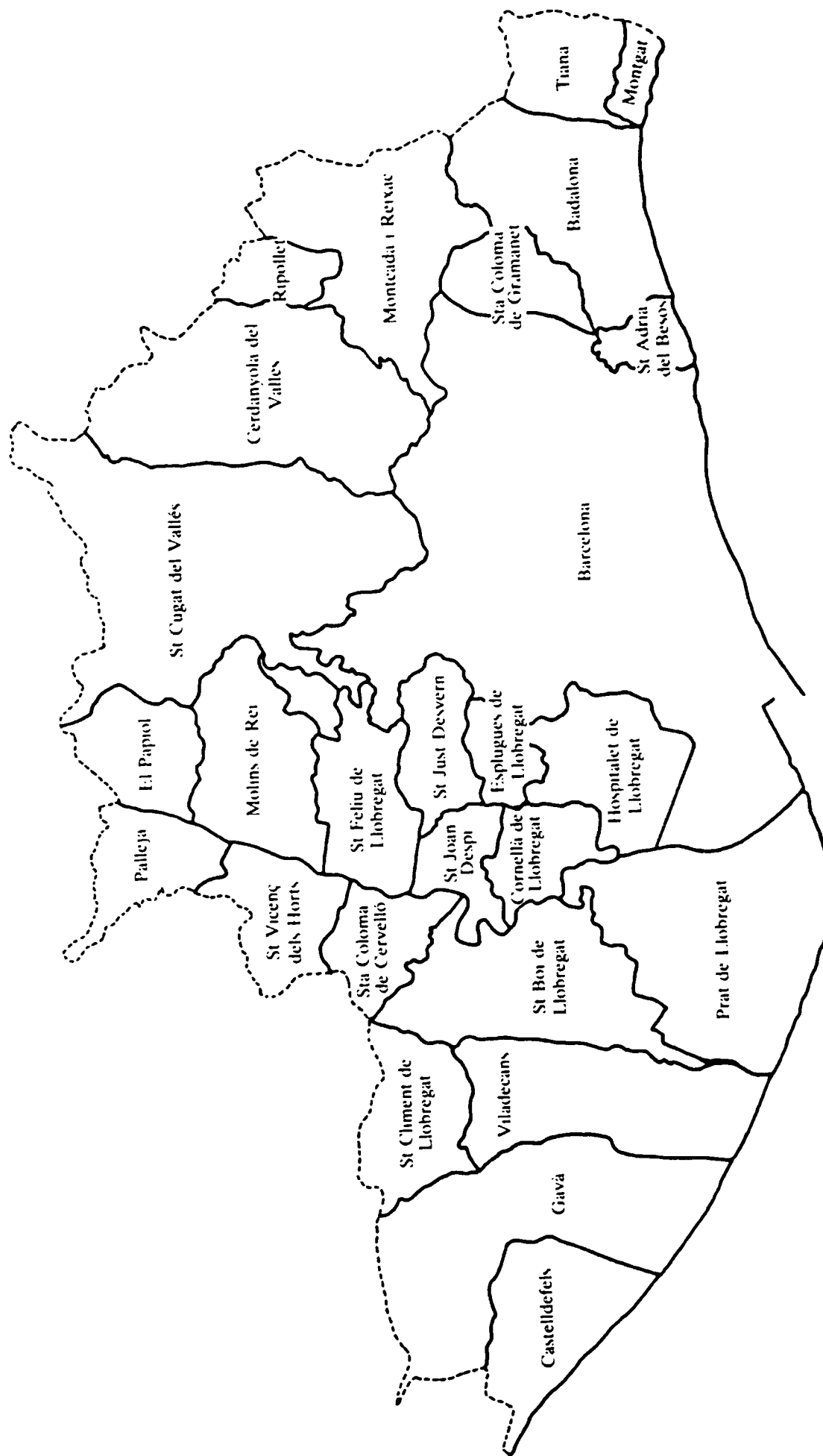
Finally, I must express my gratitude to Caragh Wells, who was a tireless source of emotional and intellectual support.

Although the assistance of all the aforementioned have improved this study, it goes without saying that any errors or misjudgements contained within are my own.



# Barcelona City

Source: David Goodway (Ed.) For Anarchism. History, Theory, and Practice, London 1990, p. 81.



# Barcelona Province

Source: David Goodway (Ed.) For Anarchism, p. 84.

## Glossary of Organisations

ACR	Acció Catalana Republicana - bourgeois Republican party allied to ERC
BOC	Bloc Obrer i Camperol - anti-Stalinist communist party
CADCI	Centre Autonomista de Dependents del Comerç i de la Indústria - autonomous <i>Catalaniste</i> white collar and shop workers' union
CDE	Comisión de Defensa Económica - CNT-organised body devoted to raising working class living standards
CEDA	Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas - main rightist party in the 1930s, of quasi-fascist persuasion
CNT	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo - anarcho-syndicalist union
COPUB	Cámara Oficial de la Propiedad Urbana de Barcelona - major urban property owners' organisation
CSR	Comités Sindicalistas Revolucionarias - pro-Bolshevik cells in the CNT
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya - middle class Republicans
FAI	Federación Anarquista Ibérica - anarchist secret society
FIJL	Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias - FAI youth movement
GABOC	Grupos de acción del BOC - BOC self-defence groups
ICE	Izquierda Comunista de España - small Trotskyist grouping
IWA	International Workingmens' Association - world organisation of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist groups
OSR	Oposición Sindical Revolucionaria - reformed CSR in 1930-1931
PCE	Partido Comunista de España - official pro-Stalinist communist party
PNRE	Partit Nacionalista Republicà d'Esquerra - left-wing Catalan Republicans
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista - party formed from the fusion of the BOC and the ICE in 1935
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español - the Spanish social-democratic party
PSUC	Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya - Catalan Communist Party
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores - Socialist trade union movement
USC	Unió Socialista de Catalunya - tiny Fabian-socialist party, close to ERC
U. de R.	Unió de Rabassaires - Catalan tenant farmers' union

## A note on foreign terms.

Throughout this thesis I have preferred Catalan to Castilian wherever it has been appropriate (eg street names, etc.). Similarly, the people of Barcelona are described collectively as the *Barcelonins* rather than as the *Barcelonese*. However, I have not attempted to *Catalanise* that which is commonly described in Spanish. Thus, while the *de facto* Catalan party the BOC, is referred to as the Bloc, the CNT, a truly Spanish trade union, is described as the Confederación.

## **Introduction**

What follows is a social and cultural study of the Barcelona proletariat during the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1936). Unlike many historical and organisational studies of working class groups and labour organisations, this study looks beyond the formal aspects of politics to locate praxis firmly within the wider socio-economic fabric of everyday life. In doing so, the emphasis moves away from an explanation of the opposition of the CNT-FAI to the Republic in terms of a fixed set of ideological shibboleths and the traditional anarchist opposition to authority. Instead, this study assesses the attitude of the CNT towards the Republic in terms of the failure of the authorities to eradicate the traditional patterns of social exclusion and their inability to satisfy the predominantly unskilled and unemployed supporters of the CNT-FAI in Barcelona. Particular emphasis is placed on patterns of social and urban exclusion and working class culture.

I have set out to retrieve the historic experience of a specific sector of the Barcelona working class: the much-maligned unskilled, itinerant and immigrant labourers who, quite literally, built modern Catalonia. International economic collapse and internal political stability inside Spain during the late 1920s and the early 1930s meant that increasing numbers of these workers were unemployed. The experience of unemployment, its impact on the culture of the jobless and their everyday resistance to poverty, form the core of this study. This provides a starting point for a social history of crime and punishment in 1930s Barcelona. Particular attention is given to the anarchist attitude to crime and the way in which the FAI encouraged illegal methods of internal funding.

This study relies on mainly qualitative, rather than quantitative, analysis. While statistics are not entirely banished, the analysis is premised on the view that the plight of the unemployed cannot be adequately expressed numerically. Consequently, this work is overwhelmingly based on a reading of the press from the 1930s. This aversion to hard-boiled empiricism is only in part justified by the practical reason that Spanish statistics, whether collated by the authorities or the labour movement, were notoriously unreliable. The methodological level of enquiry is also conditioned by an overriding



concern with the revolutionary culture of the proletarian masses of Barcelona and the social processes that shaped this. By its very nature, such an object of study is not quantifiable, a point that is well reinforced by the classic studies by E.P. Thompson and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies on the English proletariat and policing and the more recent work by Dai Smith on the cultural universe of Welsh labour.<sup>1</sup> Following from these works, this study relies heavily on press reports, biography and oral sources in a bid to recuperate the social and cultural dimensions of popular consciousness. The epistemological essence of this approach has been presciently grasped by Paul Thompson, who observes that:

'social statistics, in short, no more represent absolute facts than newspaper reports, private letters, or published biographies. Like recorded interview material, they all represent, either from individual standpoints or aggregated, the *social perception* of facts; and are all in addition subject to social pressures from the context in which they are obtained. With these forms of evidence, what we receive is *social meaning*, and it is this which must be evaluated'.<sup>2</sup>

Social history has been criticised in the past for 'ignoring' politics.<sup>3</sup> Because the 1930s was an era of intense political change and ideological conflict in Spain this study has been forced to transcend this shortcoming. This research places the social history of the unemployed at the centre of the political history of the CNT during the Republic. An example of this is the way in which the historic tensions between the CNT and the rival UGT are expressed through the conflict between the essentially unemployed and unskilled membership of the Barcelona CNT and the predominantly employed and skilled supporters of the UGT in the Catalan capital.

This fusion of social and political analysis is also central to a full understanding of the experience of the Republic in Barcelona. This work is especially concerned with the extent to which the Republic represented a change for the Barcelona working class, not just in a political sense, but in social and economic terms. Clearly, the Republic

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<sup>1</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1963 and *Customs in Common*, Harmondsworth, 1993; Stuart Hall, *et. al.*, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London, 1978; Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales*, Cardiff, 1994

<sup>2</sup> Paul Thompson *The Voice of the Past*, London, 1978, p.96

<sup>3</sup> Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, 'Why does social history ignore politics?', *Social History*, 5, 2, 1980, pp.249-271

established a set of constitutional and democratic guarantees that had rarely existed in the past. However, the primary concern here is with how the advent of the new régime affected the lives of the workers of Barcelona and to what extent it altered the previous patterns of social exclusion and oppression.

While this study covers the period from the birth of the Second Republic in April 1931 to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, the focus of the narrative and analysis is concentrated heavily on 1931. This is justifiable because this was the key period for the future of the Republic. It was 'Republican Year Zero', a time of disproportionate importance, in which the newly-ensconced Republican authorities sought to establish a new political and social order capable of embracing those classes and social strata which had been excluded from previous régimes. Thus, 1931 was the year in which the Republican project of integrating the Barcelona working class would either succeed or fail. Equally, the concentration on the blend of social and political variables at play in 1931 is also valid as it facilitates a more sophisticated understanding of the complex trajectory of the CNT during the Republic. By assessing the real and shifting aspirations and hopes of the union rank-and-file, we supersede the caricatured image of the CNT and its supporters as robots who were guided by exclusively ideological and doctrinal concerns.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, because this study is not a political history of the convoluted institutional relationship between Catalonia and Spain in the 1930s, attention is paid to the often complex and shifting configuration of power in a quasi-federal state only insofar as it intersects the main area of study.

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<sup>4</sup> An example of this one-sided view of the rationale of the CNT and its membership can be found, for instance, in Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Revolution*, London, 1970 and, by the same author, *Spain's First Democracy. The Second Republic, 1931-1936*, Madison, 1993

## **Chapter 1: Barcelona before the Republic**

### **1.1. The Making of the Barcelona Working Class**

From the advent of industrialisation in Catalonia right up until the 1930s, employers had more or less continuously enjoyed the upper hand in labour issues. By 1930 many sections of the Barcelona proletariat had never succeeded in establishing either an improvement in working conditions or collective labour contracts with their employers. In one part, bourgeois supremacy reflected the support of successive monarchist governments. However, capitalist power was also derived from the under-capitalised nature of Catalan industry, which was based on the hyper-exploitation of a largely unskilled working class. This hyper-exploitation was facilitated by a substantial number of unemployed proletarians, the 'reserve army of labour' described by Karl Marx, whose willingness to work was a perennial obstacle to rebellion.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of a pocket of unemployed, unskilled proletarians enabled industries to run on a casualised basis, with only a limited number of permanent employees. It was customary for legions of workers to mill around allotted places in the hope that they would be contracted for the day. A variety of factors made this system immensely attractive for employers. Firstly, this casualised pattern of work meant that employers were relieved of all responsibility for the workers other than on the odd days when they were hired. Secondly, the informal pattern of hiring allowed for favouritism and, conversely, the elimination of 'unfavoured' workers, especially union militants, from the workplace. Thirdly, casualisation was an important downward push on wages. While, for instance, it was possible to earn 15 pesetas for a days work on the docks, hands might be hired only two or three times in any given week, thus earning a far from satisfactory wage. Finally, the existence of a mass of pauperised workers who were normally denied a regular role within the labour force tended to reinforce the 'sweated' nature of the industrial structure, as well as serving as a useful reminder to workers of the fate that awaited them if they broke the discipline imposed by employers.

Backward forms of 'sweated' labour were the most characteristic feature of the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, London, 1961, vol.1, p.632; Maria José Sirera Oliag, *Obreros en Barcelona, 1900-1910*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Barcelona University, 1959, p.33

Barcelona economy. The textile industry, a sector normally associated with the first spurt of capitalist development, was paradigmatic. Based predominantly on casualised labour, the textile sector had only minuscule pockets of skilled workers and was one of Barcelona's biggest employers right into the 1930s. Other industrial sectors shared many of the characteristics of the textile industry. The docks, construction and woodworking all provide examples of industries based on a vicious combination of 'sweated' and casual labour. Similarly, the metal and transport industries, both of which were new additions to the local economy in the 1920s, remained anchored in unskilled and, more often than not, 'sweated' labour. Even traditionally privileged sectors of the workforce like printers faced wretched working conditions in Barcelona. Overall, therefore, the workers in the Catalan capital comprised a thoroughly unstable force, yet, at the same time, this unskilled, impoverished proletariat was a vital complement to the archaic and under-capitalised industries of Catalan capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

Another key feature of the Barcelona economy was its heavy reliance on child labour. The conditions facing child workers were abysmal and according to one working class commentator, 'men ceased being children at the age of eight, they were adults at fifteen and old at forty'. At the turn of the century, it was commonplace for young children to work a 12 hour day. Children experienced few benefits from their early baptism in the world of industry and it was not uncommon for them to undergo an initial contractual period, sometimes lasting a full year, in which they were unpaid but were still required to fulfil the dirtiest and most dangerous tasks in the factory. Young operatives were subjected to harsh labour discipline by foremen, who were known to beat those children who failed to keep up with work rates. Despite these drawbacks, the prospect of even the slightest improvement in the common economy of proletarian families guaranteed that a steady flow of children as young as six entered the workplace. When the employer-friendly monarchical state finally introduced legislation to protect the worst excesses of child exploitation at the turn of the century, capitalists

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Ealham, "Anarcocapitalistes", "Lumpenburgeria" and the Origins of Anarchism in Catalonia', *ACIS*, 7, 1, 1994, pp.50-55

circumvented the law by contracting children as 'apprentices', although in practice there was no technical preparation or training, just the 'sweated' labour of the past.

Meanwhile, many employers felt neither loyalty or compassion towards their operatives and in many workshops it was common for management to record the date of birth of child workers so that they could be sacked before their 16th birthday to save the extra wages paid to adult labourers.<sup>3</sup>

The working life of adult operatives was barely more auspicious. In 1927 around 50% of the workforce in Barcelona laboured in small enterprises and the overall employer-worker ratio was 1:15. It was common for workshops to be located in poorly converted, insalubrious 'sweat-shops', with little natural sunlight or ventilation. These ill-maintained factories with few safety standards ensured that Barcelona province enjoyed the dark accolade of topping the Spanish league table for labour accidents throughout the thirty-six year period running from the turn of the century up until the Civil War.<sup>4</sup>

These same uncompetitive industries, with their slim profit levels and insecure markets, generated a highly authoritarian bourgeois class consciousness. Catalan capitalists evinced a Hobbesian sense of manifest destiny that elevated the naked pursuit of profit and their own class interests over those of the rest of the population. Working class demands, whether individual or collective, were bitterly resented as an impudent threat to profits. Similarly, cuts in the duration of the working week, seen in much of Europe as a necessary philanthropic measure to heighten the well-being of workers, were regarded by Catalan industrialists as a mortal threat to production levels. The arrogance of this bourgeois philosophy was cruelly apparent in the 'theory of

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<sup>3</sup> Álvaro Soto Carmona, *El trabajo industrial en la España contemporánea*, Barcelona, 1989, p.700; José Peiró, *Juan Peiró: teórico y militante anarcosindicalista español*, Barcelona, 1978, pp.9-10; José Peirats, *Figuras del movimiento libertario Español*, Barcelona, 1978, p.227; César Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles y el poder*, Paris, 1972, p.44, n.5; Joaquim Ferrer and Simó Piera, *Simó Piera: Perfil d'un sindicalista. Records i experiències d'un dirigent de la CNT*, Barcelona, 1975, pp.17-25; Susanna Tavera and Enric Ucelay da Cal, 'Conversa amb Sebastià, un líder cenetista català', *L'Avenc*, 6, 1977, p.11; Joan Llarch, *Los días rojinegros. Memorias de un niño libertario. 1936*, Barcelona, 1977, p.22

<sup>4</sup> Pere Gabriel, 'La Barcelona obrera y proletaria', in Alejandro Sánchez (ed.), *Barcelona, 1888-1929. Modernidad, ambición y conflictos de una ciudad soñada*, Madrid, 1994, p.104; Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, pp.633-634, 662

professional danger', a calculating industrial doctrine that postulated 'free labourers' had to bear the full consequences of industrial work. Clearly, this perspective was well suited to the rickety structure of industrial production in Catalonia: it conveniently relieved employers of all responsibility for accidents at work and it served as a *raison d'être* for reducing wages to subsistence levels. Antoni Jutglar correctly described this shared set of bourgeois idiosyncrasies as 'class egoism'.<sup>5</sup>

The hard realities of industrial life were largely ignored by the monarchical authorities. There are several reasons why the welfare and social functions of the state were highly restricted. Firstly, the under-capitalised industries of Catalonia were a poor basis for the collection of taxes necessary to sustain a welfare state. Secondly, even when the state promulgated reforms in favour of the working masses, as in the case of the restriction of child labour, these laws tended to exist only on paper as the authorities lacked the power to impose them against the recalcitrant opposition of the economic oligarchy. Contrary to the trend in most of secular Europe, where public bodies took over social and welfare functions, the Church remained an integral part of the Spanish monarchical state. In Barcelona, friars and nuns accounted for the bulk of hospital nurses. They also ran orphanages, the main psychiatric hospital in the city and the *Cases de treball i feina*, the workhouses that functioned as business enterprises for the Church. Authoritarian religious thinking permeated all of these welfare institutions, while the Catholic bourgeoisie fêted the clergy as a useful tool of social control, particularly within the education system. Relations between the urban masses and the clergy were, therefore, frequently poisonous, and the bulk of the working class looked on the Church as a parasitic, repressive force.<sup>6</sup> By way of self-defence, the Church employed a catastrophic rhetoric, reflected in the prophecy of Archbishop Torres i Bages, that

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<sup>5</sup> Antoni Jutglar, *Historia crítica de la burguesía en Cataluña*, Barcelona, 1984, pp.322-323, 333-336

<sup>6</sup> Fernando Álvarez-Uría, 'Vells i nous pobres. Rodamons i pobres vàlids a la llum de les ciències socials i polítiques', *Acàcia*, 3, 1993, pp.78-83; *El Escándalo*, 6 February, 16 September 1926; Frances Lannon, 'The Socio-Political Role of the Spanish Church - A Case Study', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14, 1979, 193-210; Joan Connelly Ullman, *The Tragic Week. A Study of Anticlericalism in Spain, 1875-1912*, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, pp.27-58, 322-332

'Catalonia will be Christian, or it will cease to be'.<sup>7</sup>

Catalan industrialists held a similarly apocalyptic philosophy about the 'social question'. A consistent advocate of strong government, the Catalan bourgeoisie accepted the protection offered by the Restoration constitutional democracy which, far from democratic or constitutional, was based on widespread electoral falsification. For all the stability brought to capitalism by the state, Catalan employers never felt secure. According to Jordi Casassas Ymbert capitalists were marked by 'a generalised sensation of being unprotected by the authorities'. Indicative of this unease, at the turn of the century Guillermo Graell, the secretary of the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, the main Catalan employers' association, complained of the 'shameful social indiscipline that prevails, of the disorder and licentiousness of customs in the streets'.<sup>8</sup>

Bourgeois fears were based on the assumption that crime and illegality were exclusively proletarian preserves. Of particular alarm were street gangs composed of 'hobos' (*trinxeraires*) and 'runaway children' who rebelled against autocratic family life. Another cause for concern were the 'TB gangs', composed of immiserated youths whose abysmal social conditions had exposed them to a disease which rendered them unemployable in the eyes of most employers.<sup>9</sup> Bourgeois disquiet was given a new edge through the overlap between the rough street antics of working class youth and the anarchist movement. This confluence was epitomised in the antics of 'The Sons of Bitches' ('Els Fills de Puta'), a gang of juvenile anarchists which roamed the rough, tough streets, bars and cafés of downtown Barcelona.<sup>10</sup>

With the emergence of the organised labour movement, bourgeois criminologists and psychologists asserted connections between physical illness and degeneration and

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Víctor Alba, *Cataluña de tamaño natural*, Barcelona, 1975, p.194

<sup>8</sup> Jordi Casassas Ymbert, 'Batallas y ambigüedades del catalanismo', in Sánchez (ed.), p.130; Graell cited in Pere López Sánchez, *Un verano con mil julios y otras estaciones. Barcelona: de la Reforma Interior a la Revolución de Julio de 1909*, Madrid, 1993, p.80

<sup>9</sup> J. Juderías, *La juventud delincuente. Leyes e instituciones que tienden a su regeneración*, Madrid, 1912, p.8; José Elías de Molins, *La obrera en Cataluña, en la ciudad y en el campo*, Barcelona, 1915, p.53; Juli Vallmitjana, *Criminalitat típica local*, Barcelona, 1910, p.8; Manuel Gil Maestre, *La criminalidad en Barcelona y en las grandes poblaciones*, Barcelona, 1886, pp.23-31

<sup>10</sup> Baltasar Porcel, *La revuelta permanente*, Barcelona, 1978, p.54; Emili Salut, *Vivers de revolucionaris. Apunts històrics del Districte Cinquè*, Barcelona, 1938, pp.147-148

the 'madness' (*locura*) or 'cancer' of collective protest. The assumed links between proletarian militancy and deviancy and physical disease saw the invention of new misdemeanours, such as the 'collective crimes' of organised dissent. On a preventive level, the authorities became committed to the internment of 'errant' youths in borstals in the hope that they would not become perverted by 'wayward ideologies'. Thus, in 1890 the Asil Durán was founded by the local authorities for the clergy to re-educate the 'rebel', 'disobedient' and 'non-conformist' youth of Barcelona with the therapy of hard labour.<sup>11</sup>

However, the spectre of social discipline remained a living obsession for Catalan capitalists. This was reflected in their desire to extend their control beyond the workplace, into all spheres of social life. Bourgeois dreams of social harmony were expressed through urbanism. Enric Prat de la Riba, one of the leading early voices of *Catalanisme*, had a vision of an 'imperial Barcelona', which presupposed extinguishing the latent social war and pacifying the internal proletarian enemy within the confines of the metropolis. This project was reflected in city's most imaginative architect, Antoni Gaudí i Cornet, a highly anti-democratic thinker, who had close ties to bourgeois circles. Gaudí's plan for La Sagrada Família reflected his conviction that the godless proletariat of Barcelona was in desperate need of new places of worship. Gaudí typified bourgeois hopes that 'christianisation' would instil urbanity and civic responsibility in workers, demobilise the proletariat and obscure the prevailing material inequality in the city.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of public resources and the already pronounced sense of separation

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<sup>11</sup> A. Pulido, *El cáncer comunista. Degeneración del socialismo y del sindicalismo*, Valencia, n.d., p.10; Francisco de Xercavins, *¿Cabe una institución entre la escuela y la cárcel?*, Barcelona, 1889; Assumpció Pomares and Vicenç Valentí, 'Notas per a un estudi sobre el control social a la Barcelona del segle XIX: la instrucció pública', *Acàcia*, 3, 1993, p.135; *El Escándalo*, 16 September 1926. For a stimulating study of the shifting relationship between intellectuals and the masses during this time see Sebastian Balfour, 'The Solitary Peak and the Dense Valley: Intellectuals and Masses in Fin de Siècle Spain', *Tesserae*, 1, 1, 1994, pp.1-19

<sup>12</sup> López Sánchez, *Un verano*, p.66; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 10 August 1905, 24 April 1909; Pere López Sánchez, 'El desordre de l'ordre. Al·legats de la ciutat disciplinària en el somni de la Gran Barcelona', *Acàcia*, 3, 1993, p.103; Robert Hughes, *Barcelona*, London, 1992, pp.474-475, 498. 'Introduction: historical materialist approaches to urban sociology' in C.G. Pickvance (ed.), *Urban Sociology: Critical Essays*, London, 1980, pp.1-32



between the main classes in Catalan society meant that bourgeois urbanistic and ideological projects aimed at integrating the subaltern classes did not come to fruition. Increasingly, repression seemed the easiest option available to the upper classes. Joan Maragall, the national poet of Catalonia, wrote of the need 'to purify (*depurar*) the mass, expelling bad people, rendering them incapable of committing evil, watching them, impeding also criminal propaganda'. The Lliga Regionalista, the main political party of the Catalan bourgeoisie formed at the beginning of this century, embodied the neurosis of industrialists. This overwhelming sense of social insecurity in the face of the 'internal enemy' grew after the 1909 Setmana Tràgica, when the workers of Barcelona first revealed their ability to capture the streets of the city from the police. The traditional bourgeois yearning for 'social discipline' now crystallised around the need for repression. The Lliga developed law-and-order panics as its stock-in-trade and it demanded a greater political voice so that it could increase the grip of the state over society and protect bourgeois civilisation from its proletarian enemies. The ultra-reactionary Lliga continually berated the Madrid authorities for leaving the 'respectable classes' at the mercy of a 'criminal population' and selling Catalonia short in the war against criminality. Prat de la Riba contended that all social violence in Barcelona was due to the failings of the Spanish authorities to provide an effective police force in the city.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, alongside this ideology of order, the dividing line between legal and illegal business practises in Catalonia was perhaps finer than anywhere else in Europe at the turn of the century. Moreover, this was a growing trend, particularly among those capitalists who enriched themselves during World War One, many of whom behaved in a thoroughly illegal way and it was widely believed that apart from ignoring labour legislation, many companies kept two sets of books, regularly falsified accounts and cheated on tax payments. As one social observer of the 1920s reflected, 'the classic swindle (*timo*) and the cloudy business deal were the order of the day'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> López Sánchez, *Un verano*, p.85; Josep Benet, *Maragall i la Setmana Tràgica*, Barcelona, 1965; Guillem Graell, *La cuestión catalana*, Barcelona, 1902, *passim*.; Jordi Solé-Tura, *Catalanismo y revolución burguesa. La síntesis de Prat de la Riba*, Madrid, 1970, pp.249, 256, 258

<sup>14</sup> José Luis Vila-San-Juan, *La vida cotidiana en España durante la dictadura de Primo de Rivera*,

Although the Catalan bourgeoisie was in no immediate danger of being toppled, its fears were not completely unfounded. José Maria Macarro Vera has spoken of the 'preventive inefficiency of the state' in Spain. In Barcelona, there was traditionally a very high police-inhabitant ratio which, due to deficient public spending and population growth, tended to rise throughout the first part of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> In qualitative terms, the inefficiency of the Catalan police was legend. Police work was widely seen as low-status employment which, according to one former Barcelona Chief of Police, was 'the quick solution to a family catastrophe'.<sup>16</sup> However, police work was poorly remunerated. A visiting French police commissioner was staggered to discover that the Barcelona Chief of Police had dual employment to make ends meet. Bad pay bred corruption. By the turn of the century *La policía española*, the professional journal of the Spanish constabulary, recognised that the Barcelona police force had become deeply involved in the sale of arms, extortion, protection rackets, prostitution, illegal gaming, as well as the widespread framing of innocent citizens. *La policía española* ironically concluded that if the authorities were committed to ending crime in the Catalan capital, they would have to commence by incarcerating the entire police force in Barcelona.

The shadowy pursuits of the Barcelona police grew during World War One, when the city became a haven for the secret services of the belligerent powers. During these years the Barcelona Chief of Police, Bravo Portillo, supplemented his salary by

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Barcelona, 1984, p.64; Salvador Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes históricas de "Solidaridad Obrera"*, Barcelona, 1937, pp.247-252; Ramón Garriga, *Juan March y su tiempo*, Barcelona, 1976, pp.76-115, 142-156, 183-204. The criminal nature of the wartime *nouveaux riches* is fictionalised by Eduardo Mendoza in *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta*, Barcelona, 1983 and *La ciudad de los prodigios*, Barcelona, 1986

<sup>15</sup> José Maria Macarro Vera, *Sevilla la roja*, Seville, 1989, pp.50-51. Macarro Vera observes that in the industrial port of Seville in 1931 there were only 40 policemen, all of whom 'were so well known in the city that they could not exercise any serious informative tasks.' Meanwhile, in Barcelona, between 1896 and 1905 the number of police in the city decreased from 193 to 170. During the same period the population of the Catalan capital rose by around 25%, thereby leaving a ratio of 1 policeman for every 3,200 inhabitants. By way of comparison, in Hamborn, a largely insignificant provincial German town where the bourgeoisie expressed similar complaints about the lack of policing, the police-inhabitant ratio was 1:102, far superior to that in Barcelona: José Alvarez Junco, *El Emperador del Paralelo. Lerroux y la demagogía populista*, Madrid, 1990, pp.151-152, n.46; Richard J. Evans, *Rethinking German History*, London, 1987, p.172

<sup>16</sup> Rafael Núñez Florencio, *El terrorismo anarquista, 1888-1909*, Madrid, 1983, pp.99-103; Emilio Mola, *Memorias de mi paso por la dirección general de seguridad. Lo que yo supe...*, Madrid, n.d., vol.1, p.28

becoming a German agent. Amid considerable intrigue and with so many rich pickings in the 'black economy', the poorly trained police progressively devoted less time to regular police work. This produced a dearth of intelligence that was exacerbated by the habit of agents to take their archives, records and papers with them when they left the force. To overcome this weakness, the police relied on a network of *confidants*. However, this brought its own problems as *confidants* frequently impeded police work by giving false information, either as part of their own criminal extortion or as a means of emphasising their importance to their paymasters. The ill-informed activities of the police and their often unjustified arrests meant that many *Barcelonins* ceased to regard the force as their protectors, viewing them instead as their mortal enemies.<sup>17</sup>

The police compensated for its *preventive* and *investigative* shortcomings through its *reactive* capacity to meet threats to public order, that is to say, its purely repressive capacity. The force distinguished itself by its 'preventive brutality' and the violence it directed against both criminals and, later on, those suspected of trade union activities. To satisfy the craving for order of the authorities and the 'respectable classes', workers were policed disproportionately on the grounds of their assumed civic irresponsibility. All police stereotypes of the criminal were abstracted from images of the proletarian. By contrast, if accused, the propertied classes were simply investigated by the police, and even then, not always. For example, the police regularly ignored instances where employers illegally contravened labour or safety legislation, even though this often resulted in the loss of life. No such leniency was extended to the lower classes and officialdom reacted sharply to even the most petty act of theft by workers. Charges were often invented fiction and convictions were obtained through the brutal interrogation known as the 'third degree'. Police brutality was abetted by the civil authorities who allowed the police to detain 'suspects' without trial (*presos gubernativos*). This form of illegal detention was known colloquially as the *quintzenes*,

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<sup>17</sup> Porcel, *La revuelta*, p.139; López Sánchez, *Un verano*, pp.99, 100-103; *La policía española* cited in Pedro Trinidad Fernández, *La defensa de la sociedad. Cárcel y delincuencia en España (siglos XVIII-XX)*, Madrid, 1991, pp.298-309; Mola, *Memorias*, vol.1, p.47; Ángel Pestaña, *Terrorismo en Barcelona (memorias inéditas)*, Barcelona, 1979, pp.138-143

as it allowed police 15 days to extract a 'confession'. If this proved impossible, pliant authorities could, if they chose, subject the *quintzenaris* indefinitely to internment without trial, the duration of which depended on the whim of the Civil Governor. It was not uncommon for these detainees to face new beatings, particularly in the form of the dreaded 'pasillo', a corridor through which detainees were punched, kicked and coshed by two lines of police and jailors, before arriving at underground cells that resembled medieval dungeons, insalubrious dens of disease, sometimes replete with rats.

While exemplary state cruelty was intended to show real and potential enemies of the law the errors of their errant ways, it was also instrumental in creating crime, through the absence of mechanisms whereby the 'offender' could be re-incorporated into social life. Instead, a vindictive blend of conservative social attitudes, employer blacklists and the stigma of conviction often made it impossible for ex-convicts to find work, particularly as many employers required letters of 'good conduct' from prospective workers and frequently refused to contract employees without a fixed abode. Consequently, the prospects of crime and recidivism were guaranteed by the very functions and limitations of justice. However, this state of affairs was very much in keeping with the exclusive structures of the monarchical authorities and their project to create a consensus around the 'goodness' of Christian and labouring values, while separating dangerous 'evil-doers' from the honourable sectors of society.<sup>18</sup>

As mass unions rendered traditional employer punishments like the blacklisting of 'unreliable' workers and the 'hunger accord' (*el pacto del hambre*) ineffective, 'preventive brutality' became more prominent. This was spearheaded by the political police, the Brigada Policial especializada en Anarquismo y Sindicalismo. The files of the political police on trade unionists and labour militants carried precise annotated instructions to agents such as 'keep this one under constant watch' or 'make life impossible for this one'. This advice was acted upon and the police pursued leading labour militants relentlessly, sometimes to the point of forcing them to move town.

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<sup>18</sup> Pedro Trinidad Fernández, 'La configuració històrica del subjecte delinquent', *Acàcia*, 3, 1993, pp.70-71; Vallmitjana, *Criminalitat*, pp.46-49

Intimidation ranged from petty acts of harassment, such as house searches, which could come at any time of the day or the night and were often acts of simple destruction. There were many cases of the police detaining labour activists on a routine basis, even getting the worker sacked, by telling employers that the worker had committed a petty crime. This latter strategy was sometimes part of a plan to recruit police informers and there were many reported cases where agents threatened to 'frame' militants unless they worked for the authorities. Meanwhile, during times of real unrest the authorities resorted to a crude form of internal deportation ('conducción ordinaria'), whereby labour militants were detained without trial and escorted on foot to a distant jail by Guardia Civil cavalrymen.<sup>19</sup>

The police also funded provocateurs to infiltrate the labour movement. It even sponsored assassinations against key labour militants. On occasions, plain-clothed officers provoked union demonstrators in order to incite violence. Thereafter, the para-military Civil Guard, known as 'la Benemérita' to its admirers, would order the demonstration to disperse. If its regulation three warning bursts of a trumpet went unheeded, the Civil Guard, armed with its traditional sabres and Mauser rifles, either charged the demonstrators or opened fire. This violence had the aim of reclaiming the streets for the authorities by breaking the spirit of resistance of the masses and creating a social climate that favoured placing labour organisations outside the law.<sup>20</sup>

When nascent labour organisations refused to buckle under the weight of repression, monarchical justice became even more arbitrary, including the imposition of

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<sup>19</sup> L'Opinió, 4 June 1931; Francesc Madrid, *Ocho meses y un día en el gobierno civil de Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1932, p.199, n.1; Pere Foix, *Los archivos del terrorismo blanco. El fichero Lasarte. 1910-1930*, (2nd edition), Madrid, 1978; José Peiró, *Peiró*, pp.12, 21, 26,28; Jaume Fabre and Josep Maria Huertas, 'Conversa amb Hermós Plaja. El pare de dues acràcies', *L'Avenç*, 28, 1980, pp.15-22; Porcel, *La revuelta*, p.128

<sup>20</sup> Manuel Ballbé, *Orden público y militarismo en la España constitucional (1812-1983)*, Madrid, 1985, pp.250-271; Diego López Garrido, *La Guardia Civil y los orígenes del Estado centralista*, Barcelona, 1982, *passim*. and, by the same author, *El aparato policial en España*, Ch.3; Alvarez Junco, *El Emperador*, p.392. This anti-labour agenda heightened the incapacity of the police for serious investigative work, as exemplified by their inquiries following the murder of a labour leader, during which they detained a number of intimate friends of the deceased: Manuel Cruells, *Salvador Seguí, el "Noi del Sucre"*, l'Esplugues de Llobregat, 1974, p.164; Porcel, *La revuelta*, pp.107, 117; Pestaña, *Terrorismo*, pp.80-82

the death penalty. This was infamously reflected in the concept of 'moral guilt' which allowed the authorities to punish and execute radical intellectuals or syndicalist leaders, even if they had played no part in the events. like the notorious execution of the anarchist educationalist Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia in 1909. Meanwhile, in the absence of evidence, the security forces sometimes avoided the technicalities of the judicial process with the ignominious 'ley de fugas', whereby detainees were 'shot while trying to escape'.<sup>21</sup>

Although these repressive practices fulfilled the short-term purpose of quashing social protest, in the long run, they served only to further highlight the separation of the proletariat from both the state and the bourgeoisie. Many workers regarded laws as inherently political and anti-proletarian, as the guarantors of bourgeois inequality. Similarly, the endemic violence and torture of the police ensured that there was a near-generalised hatred for the force among the proletariat of Barcelona. Known popularly as 'the cops' (*la bòfia*) in Catalan or 'the fuzz' (*las pasmas*) in Castilian, the security force were seen by the workers of Barcelona as little more than the *gendarmérie* of the propertied classes, bent on maintaining the existing balance of power in the city. In proletarian neighbourhoods the police were seen as an alien army of occupation that imposed itself on the streets by force. This led to strong popular traditions of opposition to the police and attacks on the security forces were celebrated by the community. In tough proletarian neighbourhoods like the Barri xino social life for many young workers revolved around daily conflicts with the police, in what one inhabitant of the area described as 'the continual battle for life'. This was accentuated by the collision of the aggressive street culture of working class youth and the pursuit of 'order' by the local constabulary.<sup>22</sup>

These rebellious customs reflected the weak social order in a city that was characterised by a fragile consensus, where authority lacked legitimacy and where stable

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<sup>21</sup> Vincent Robert, "'La Protesta Universal' contra la ejecución de Ferrer: las manifestaciones de octubre de 1909", *Historia Social*, 14, 1992, pp.61-82; Víctor Alba, *Dos revolucionarios: Andreu Nin, Joaquín Maurín*, Madrid, 1975, p.333; Juan Eslava, *Verdugos y Torturadores*, Madrid, 1993, pp.255-308

<sup>22</sup> Porcel, *La revuelta*, p.103; Salut, *Viveres*, pp.9-11, 52-57, 114, 123-124, 147-148

governance was unthinkable due to the degree of socio-political alienation felt by a large part of the proletariat. Under these volatile conditions, minor gestures of social protest were easily transformed into full-scale social war, as seen in the 1909 Setmana Tràgica and in the sporadic street violence between 1918 and 1923. In such times when the tenuous social truce completely broke down, the authorities responded with martial law (*estado de guerra*), bringing the army into the fray in a bid to keep the lid on social tensions.<sup>23</sup>

While repression brought nothing but discredit on the monarchist state in the eyes of the masses, it assuaged many of the criticisms of the illiberal capitalists of Barcelona, who obstinately refused to recognise collective bargaining. Instead, the employers preferred individual negotiation with workers because, with capital on their side, they enjoyed the right to hire and fire any worker and had free reign to determine working conditions. The readiness of the bourgeoisie to exploit the weak position of its predominantly unskilled workers in order to keep them unorganised meant that the struggle for union recognition was highly protracted. Bourgeois attitudes hardened after World War One, with the emergence of *nouveaux riches* capitalists, who revealed all the characteristics of the adventurer, in relation to both business and industrial relations. Embittered by what they saw as attempts by trade unions to usurp their new-found fortunes, these new capitalists were even more aggressive towards workers than their predecessors.<sup>24</sup>

It was within this virulent post-war context that the mass unions of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) emerged. From its birth in Catalonia in 1910, the CNT had become embroiled in a violent class struggle. Industrial relations quickly became radicalised and struggles with employers who rejected the right of

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<sup>23</sup> López Sánchez, *Un verano*, p.95; Joaquín Romero Maura, "La rosa de fuego". *El obrerismo barcelonés de 1899 a 1909*, Madrid, 1989; Joan Connelly Ullman, *The Tragic Week. A Study of Anticlericalism in Spain, 1875-1912*, Cambridge, Mass., 1968; Albert Balcells, *El sindicalismo en Barcelona (1916-1923)*, Barcelona, 1965; Léon-Ignacio, *Los años del pistoleroismo*, Barcelona, 1982; Ballbé, *Orden público*, pp.247-303

<sup>24</sup> According to Léon-Ignacio, these employers imposed social relations 'like those in the colonies between the natives and the white minority. The bourgeoisie considered its operatives as an inferior and separate race': Léon-Ignacio, 'El pistoleroismo dels anys vint', *L'Avenç*, 52, 1982, p.24

workers to unionise were *ipso facto* accompanied by robust and aggressive measures. CNT pickets were so fearsome that there were reported cases of 'scabs' crossing picket lines dressed as women. The bourgeoisie rose to the challenge of labour and in order to crush the unions the regular state security forces were augmented by the middle-class militia-men of the Sometent. When the CNT-organised 'defence squads' matched the force of the Sometent, the employers of Barcelona funded the extra-legal terror of the Sindicatos Libres to terrorise the growing legions of organised labour. In connivance with the Barcelona police, the capitalist-sponsored gunmen of the Sindicatos Libres set about eliminating a generation of trade union activists in the Catalan capital, even torturing syndicalists to the extent of permanent disfigurement.<sup>25</sup>

The anti-union terror of the Libres succeeded only in raising the stakes on the street. A pattern was established whereby whenever repression forced Confederal institutions underground and blocked the initiatives of the largely moderate CNT leadership, the ascendancy of the radical anarchists was assured. Firstly, clandestinity favoured the most radical anarchist tendencies, whose emphasis on individualism and the merits of clandestinity were, in the view of José Alvarez Junco, 'making a virtue out of a necessity'.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, growing state violence confirmed the prognosis of the radical anarchists like Arturo Parera, who favoured 'permanent and systematic terror'. In other words, by converting the streets into a contested area and prescribing mass protest, the authorities guaranteed the irruption of the advocates of militant resistance, elements who were prepared to defend their right to the streets by force of arms and who were willing to stand face-to-face with the gunmen of the Libres.

The readiness of the militant anarchist *grupos de afinidad* ('affinity groups') to pick up the gauntlet thrown down by the bourgeoisie and the Libres converted the Catalan capital into a violent inferno. Recruited from the growing numbers of

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<sup>25</sup> Manuel Sastre, *Las huelgas en Barcelona y sus resultados durante el año 1907*, Barcelona, 1908, p.12; Pere Foix, *La banda Negra (Origen y la actuación de los pistoleros de Barcelona, 1918-1921)*, (2nd edition) Barcelona, 1978; Balcells, *El sindicalismo*; León-Ignacio, *Los años, passim.*; Pestaña, *Terrorismo*, pp.122-180

<sup>26</sup> José Alvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español 1868-1910*, Madrid, 1976, p.142



unemployed in the city, the *grupistas* operated in *guerrilla*-style clandestinity and illegality, periodically emerging to meet the repression from above in kind. These struggles reaffirmed the revolutionary bohemian reputation of Barcelona, which became an epic theatre for struggle with the class enemy, serving as a point of attraction for anarchists from all over the Spanish state.<sup>27</sup>

The descent into violence and the spread of what employers' groups termed 'social crime' sharpened the ever-present obsessions of the economic oligarchy with 'social indiscipline' and 'industrial harmony'. The elimination of representative, workplace organisations became the central demand of the Catalan bourgeoisie. Finally, in 1923 the property-owners of the *Cámara Oficial de la Propiedad Urbana de Barcelona* (COPUB), the *Lliga* and the *Fomento del Trabajo Nacional* embraced the 'organic democracy' of General Primo de Rivera's dictatorship as a corrective to 'terror and crime' on the streets. The prevailing attitude of the oligarchy was summed up by the *Fomento del Trabajo Nacional*, who reflected that 'when social order is not compatible with freedom, we prefer the former'. The Catalan economic élites found their knight-protector in a Spanish general.<sup>28</sup>

## 1.2. Urban Development, Social Change and Popular Culture

Although Barcelona industry remained undercapitalised, between 1914 and 1930 the Catalan capital became an increasingly modern industrial centre. By 1930 a new working class was born and the Catalan capital was home to over 300,000 proletarians, who comprised around 35% of the entire population of the city. The re-creation of the working class gathered pace in the 1920s and the on-going demand for unskilled labour generated by the expansion of the urban transport system and the building programme

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<sup>27</sup> Alba, *Dos revolucionarios*, p.77; Ángel Pestaña, *Lo que aprendí en la vida*, (4th edition) Bilbao, 1973, vol.1, pp.40, 45; Abel Paz, *Durruti, el proletariado en armas*, Barcelona, 1978, pp.29-33; Ricardo Sanz, *El sindicalismo español antes de la guerra civil. Los hijos de trabajo*, Barcelona, 1976, p.111

<sup>28</sup> Soledad Echaondo, *Patronal catalana, corporativismo y crisis política, 1898-1923*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Autonomous University of Barcelona, 1991; Carme Massana, *Indústria, Ciutat i Propietat. Política econòmica i propietat urbana a l'àrea de Barcelona (1901-1939)*, Barcelona, 1985, pp.157-191, 223-364; Alba, *Cataluña*, p.225; *La Vanguardia*, 10 June, 6 November 1919, 29 May, 16, 19, 24 June, 8, 9, 10 August 1923; *Las Noticias*, 2 September 1923; *Comercio y Navegación*, April-August 1923

for the 1929 World Exhibition made the city a major pole of attraction for the miserable rural proletariat from the Spanish state. In the words of one anarchist, 'the disinherited of the south flowed *en masse* into the Catalan California'. This odyssey was marked by the 'serial' or 'chain immigration' of large groups from the same town or province, sometimes entire villages, who converged on the Catalan capital in search of work. By the late 1920s around 35% of the overall population of Barcelona city were non-Catalan. The majority of these immigrants came from neighbouring Valencia and Aragon, with a large part of the remainder hailing from the southern areas of Murcia and Andalusia. The growth in the population of the Catalan capital was vertiginous. Between 1920 and 1930 the overall number of inhabitants of Barcelona grew by an astounding 295,230, a demographic increase which outstripped that of industrial giants like Milan and Sheffield and which made the city the most populated city in the Spanish state. By 1930 Barcelona entered the select band of millionaire cities and was established as a major European centre which, although smaller than Paris and London, was an immense urban sprawl by Spanish standards, as testified by the 573% extension of its municipal boundary between 1867 and 1933. Graphically, the population of industrial districts like Sants and Sant Martí exceeded that of many Spanish towns and cities.<sup>29</sup>

The physiognomy of the city was changed irrevocably. Urban growth and the creation of a new proletariat increased the zonal segregation of classes within the city, exacerbating what Pere López Sánchez identified as a 'dual city' or 'two cities in one'. While in Gràcia and in some parts of the Eixample there remained a certain geographical proximity between the working class and the middle class, these districts were increasingly the exception to the norm as class divisions were reflected in geographical terms. Between 1920 and 1930 the population of proletarian Sants grew by 25,838, an increase of over 30%. Similarly, in other worker-districts, like Sant Martí

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<sup>29</sup> Peirats, *Figuras*, p.89; Jordi Nadal, *La población española. Siglos XVI-XX*, Barcelona, 1966, p.167; Jordi Vandellós, *La immigració a Catalunya*, Barcelona, 1935, pp.62-63, 160, 182-183; Massana, *Indústria*, pp.119-120, 129; Anna Cabré and Isabel Pujades, 'La població de Barcelona i el seu entorn al segle XX', *L'Avenc*, 88, 1985, p.40; Gabriel, in Sánchez (ed.), p.104; Josep Termes, *L'immigració a Catalunya i altres estudis d'història del nacionalisme català*, Barcelona, 1984, pp.192-193

and Sant Andreu, there were growth rates of 40.26% and 47.45% respectively. Meanwhile, during the same ten year period, the population of the essentially petit bourgeois residential Eixample increased by a mere 26%. Moreover, this rise was due to the gravitation of the middle classes towards the Eixample from other districts of Barcelona, something that further underlined the growing segregation of classes in the city.<sup>30</sup>

The segregation of classes was even more pronounced in the rapidly developed urban and industrial hinterland of Barcelona, where the population had doubled during in the 1920s due to the establishment of bigger plants on the outskirts of the city. Surrounding industrial satellites, like Granollers, Mataró, Terrassa and Sabadell, saw considerable population growth, as did Badalona, a city to the North of Barcelona, who population increased by over 50%. The strain of the population increase also fell on areas that lacked industry but yet provided space for urban growth. Santa Coloma de Gramanet and Sant Adrià del Besòs, two small towns between Barcelona and Badalona, had population growth of 373% and 507% respectively between 1920 and 1930. Meanwhile, to the South of Barcelona, l'Hospitalet became the major receptacle for immigrant workers. Overall l'Hospitalet grew by over 200% between 1920 and 1930, while the La Torrassa-Collblanc district, the most populated area of the city, grew by 456%. With nearly 40,000 inhabitants in 1930, the population of l'Hospitalet outstripped that of Girona, Lleida and Tarragona, the three provincial Catalan capitals, and Barcelona's neighbour established itself as the second biggest city in Catalonia, right on the doorstep of the capital.<sup>31</sup>

Nick Rider has demonstrated that the Catalan bourgeoisie was incapable of

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<sup>30</sup> López Sánchez, *Un verano*, pp.24, 45-98, 127; Pere Gabriel, 'Espacio urbano y articulación política popular en Barcelona, 1890-1920', in José Luís García Delgado (ed.), *Las ciudades en la modernización de España. Los decenios interseculares*, Madrid, 1992, p.64; Nick Rider, *Anarchism, Urbanisation and Social Conflict in Barcelona, 1900-1932*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1988, p.1110; Jaume Aiguader i Miró, *El problema de l'habitatge obrera a Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1932, p.14

<sup>31</sup> Josep Roca Cladera and Enriqueta Díaz Perera, 'La Torrassa. Un antecedent de barri-dormitori', *L'Avenc*, 28, 1980, p.63; Massana, *Indústria*, p126; Gabriel in García Delgado (ed.), p.64; Josep Maria Panareda Clopís, Jaume Rios Calvet and Josep Maria Rabella Vives, *Guia de Catalunya. Todos los pueblos y todas las comarcas*, Barcelona 1989, pp.110-115; Rider, *Anarchism*, pp.1120-1121

providing a coherent plan for the development of Barcelona and its hinterland. In keeping with the widespread fragmentation of Catalan industry, the construction sector was divided into small units of capital and proved unable to meet the new demands placed on the housing market. According to Xavier Tafunell, the houses built in Barcelona during the inter-war period only met around two-thirds of the market demand. With the existing deficient housing stock quickly exhausted, and in the absence of any coordinated public housing policy from either the state or the municipal authorities, there was an acute housing shortage in the 1920s.<sup>32</sup>

Many of the single immigrant itinerant labourers unable to procure fixed accommodation found rooms in the array of cheap pensions and 'doss houses' (*casas de dormir*) in the Barri xino, where beds were rented by the day or the hour. However, this was unrealistic for immigrant families, who were subjected to numerous abuses by the landlord class. Organised in the COPUB and with close links to local networks of power, the landlords had a complete disregard for tenants' rights and the scant housing legislation passed during the monarchy. This meant that even the most squalid hovel could bring in a lucrative rent. In the Barri xino housing shortages led to the subdivision of existing housing stock into a series of 'beehives', often with four or more families in a flat originally intended for one and by 1930, there were over 100,000 subtenants in Barcelona. Because of the acute shortages within an unregulated market, houses were thrown up in the ghettos of Barcelona and l'Hospitalet with little concern for the living conditions of their residents.<sup>33</sup>

The instability of the local economy and the twin threat of inflation and unemployment made it difficult for newcomers to pay the hefty deposits and rents demanded by landlords. The dearth of affordable housing stock for the unemployed and

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<sup>32</sup> Rider's pioneering Ph.D. study is indispensable in order to understand the historical limitations of the housing sector in Barcelona, especially pp.113-217; Xavier Tafunell, 'La construcción en Barcelona, 1860-1935: continuidad y cambio', in García Delgado (ed.), pp.5-9, n.10

<sup>33</sup> Gil Maestre, *La criminalidad*, pp.147-157; Roca Cladera and Díaz Perera, 'La Torrassa', pp.63, 69; Nick Rider, 'The practice of direct action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931', in David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, Practice*, London, 1989, p.85; Gabriel, in García Delgado (ed.), p.64; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 May 1931

the unskilled led to the emergence of shanties (*barracas*) throughout Barcelona, of which there were over 6,000 by 1927. Built from cardboard, metal sheeting and even household rubbish, the shanties lacked even the most rudimentary drainage and sanitation, they were highly vulnerable to the extremities of heat and rain and brought the constant danger of disease. In the run up to the 1929 World Exhibition the number of shanties soared, as whole districts of make-shift dwellings were constructed by immigrant workers, particularly in Sants, Poble Sec and l'Hospitalet. According to one estimate, 10% of *Barcelonins* were forced to live in shanties. However, while the majority of the shanties were rent-free, whenever possible, landowners imposed rents on shanty-dwellers, sometimes even above the market rate for a flat.<sup>34</sup>

As the housing situation deteriorated, the dictatorial authorities were finally compelled to launch a public housing initiative towards the end of the 1920s. However, this project was far removed from the bourgeois-utopian plans to regulate urban growth and construct an 'imperial Barcelona'. Instead, the authorities acted in a cosmetic way, initiating rudimentary slum clearance to eliminate the mass of shanties before the arrival of foreign visitors for the 1929 Exhibition. The result was the construction of the so-called *Cases Barates* ('Cheap Houses'), a series of council-owned dwellings under the administration of the Patronat de l'Habitació, a newly formed municipal housing trust.

From the outset, the *Cases Barates* project was undermined by the same speculation that affected the private housing sector. In keeping with the untrammelled corruption of the dictatorship, Patronat members formed their own construction company which, predictably, won the contract to build the *Cases Barates*. Due to the consequent graft, the initial plan for six groups of *Cases Barates* was abandoned when the funds for the project ran out prematurely. The four groups of dwellings that were built, totalling 2,900 units, were billed as affordable municipal housing. However, the name 'Cheap Houses' was doubly a misnomer. Firstly, the accommodation was far from cheap and rents were not dissimilar to many of those in the privately rented sector.

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<sup>34</sup> Carme Massana and Francesc Roca, 'Vicis privats, iniciativa pública: Barcelona: 1901-1939', *L'Avenc*, 88, 1985, p.40; Tafunell in García Delgado (ed.), pp.5-6, n.10

Secondly, it stretches the imagination to describe the accommodation as 'houses'. The 2,900 units in the four groups of *Cases Barates* were organised in blocks of terraced 'houses' and from the air they appeared like the barrack buildings of army camps. The group of *Cases Barates* built in the waterfront area of Can Tunis, between Montjuïc and l'Hospitalet consisted of over 50 blocks and resembled a jerry-built concentration camp. Inhabitants of the *Cases Barates* were disadvantaged in more than just aesthetic terms. Built on unused farm land on the periphery of Barcelona, the *Cases Barates* were separated from the city by a cordon of fields, beyond the services of the metropolitan transport system. The groups near Santa Coloma and Horta were most isolated, seemingly gorged out of the rural landscape. Even residents in Can Tunis, potentially the best located for access to the city, still faced a 50 minute walk into Barcelona across dirt tracks or unfinished roads. Because workers were forced to get up early to walk to the end of tram lines, before commencing the journey into work, the hidden costs of living in the *Cases Barates* outweighed the negligible advantages. The geographical discomfort was even greater for the unemployed, who were forced to walk into the city centre in search of jobs. Meanwhile, working class women had to travel substantial distances to shop for basic foodstuffs in other areas.<sup>35</sup>

The *Cases Barates* were the clearest indicator of the growth in geographical and social segregation of classes. They underlined the fact that increasingly there were two distinct Barcelonas: that of the proletariat and that of the bourgeoisie. If the Barcelona of Gaudí and *modernisme* underlined the distinct cultural identity of the Catalan bourgeoisie from Spain, the new proletarian ghettos, the shanties and the *Cases Barates* all testified to the separation of the immigrant proletariat from bourgeois Barcelona. The grandiose avenues, like Passeig de Gràcia and Rambla de Catalunya, which made their way from the city centre to Alt Barcelona and the exclusively bourgeois areas of the city such as Sant Gervasi, Sarrià and Vallvidrera, stood in stark contrast to the ghettos of proletarian Barcelona, where the urban immigrant proletariat was socially and

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<sup>35</sup> Rider, *Anarchism*, p.197; Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, p.233; Massana and Roca, 'Vicis privats, iniciativa pública', p.40; *L'Opinió*, 8 May 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9 May 1931

geographically marginalised on the outskirts of the city in rapidly developed urban spaces like Santa Coloma, l'Hospitalet and the *Cases Barates*. It was this segregation that led a foreign observer of the city to conclude that 'Barcelona is constructed like a colonial city, where the city of the whites is strictly separate from the natives...Its inhabitants are two races that live in complete opposition to one another'.<sup>36</sup>

Rapid urban expansion and the establishment of new ghettos in the periphery of the city also created new social gradations within the Catalan proletariat. For instance, the gulf between the semi-skilled, provincial Catalan workers and the essentially unskilled, predominantly immigrant operatives of Barcelona was heightened. The relatively more stable conditions of employment of the provincial working class, which enjoyed a higher degree of job security, contrasted sharply with the largely unskilled proletarians of Barcelona, many of whom lacked clearly defined occupations and whose jobs were perpetually threatened by the unemployed. The social wage of the Barcelona proletariat was also inferior to that of the provinces and the unskilled immigrant working class of recent rural origin did not even experience the limited gains that befell labour during and after World War One.

Inside the Barcelona working class there were similar gradations. Geographically, immigrant workers were ghettoised in much the same way as the unskilled, black working class is today dotted around Johannesburg in 'settler camps'. Even within the older unplanned industrial suburbs of Barcelona city, like Poble Nou, Sant Martí and Sants, the more established working class sectors were better off, however slightly, in terms of housing, wages, working conditions and transport facilities. Equally, in traditional proletarian areas like Gràcia, and to a lesser degree Sants, significant sections of the working class led a relatively stable existence. However, by 1930, these areas were the exceptions to the rule, as the influx of immigrants, both qualitatively and quantitatively, had altered the composition of the working class.

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<sup>36</sup> Vandellós, *La immigració*, p.94; H.E. Kaminski, *Los de Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1976, p.38

Within this increasingly divided city the most noticeable tensions remained those between unskilled workers and the urban petit bourgeoisie, particularly in the rapidly expanded ghettos where, apart from bar owners and restaurateurs, there was little contact between workers and the middle classes. This isolation made for strong class and community allegiances among the workers, leading to the emergence of what López Sánchez has described as a proletarian 'para-society' or 'counter-society'. These loyalties were further enhanced by the nature of 'serial' immigration. This meant that in certain parts of Barcelona there were districts in which Valencians, the largest single group of newcomers to the Catalan capital, outnumbered Andalusians and Murcians by three-to-one. Meanwhile, in neighbouring l'Hospitalet, which had the largest concentration of immigrants from southern Spain, the situation was reversed, and in the La Torrassa-Collblanc district Andalusians and Murcians outnumbered Valencians by two-to-one. While the old city centre of l'Hospitalet remained largely populated by Catalans, the district of La Torrassa-Collblanc became known as 'Little Murcia' ('Murcia chica'), with southern immigrants accounting for over one-quarter of the entire population. In some parts, there were whole streets populated by Murcians, intersected by a road occupied almost exclusively by Valencians. These patterns served to provide an inner strength for what were unambiguously proletarian communities.<sup>37</sup>

The increase in the specific weight of the proletariat in Catalan society during the 1920s, especially in Barcelona and its industrial hinterland, meant that the urban working class became a decisive actor on the social stage. Equally, the mass arrival of unskilled immigrants augmented the already significant number of seasonal workers and structurally unemployed who had few roots in the city, who lacked regular contact with the workplace and who were outside the control of any single employer. The presence of legions of the unemployed in the city undermined the viability of existing structures of social control based on electoral falsification, the family, the Church and periodic repression. This was obvious in the hostile and anonymous new urban environment of

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<sup>37</sup> López Sánchez, *Un verano*, p.40; Roca Cladera and Díaz Perera, 'La Torrassa', p.64



the uprooted and socially-marginalised immigrant workers who, ignorant of the bourgeois rules of civic urbanity, displayed what López Sánchez has quite appropriately described as 'ungovernability'. This 'ungovernability' was one of the most salient aspects of the ghettos in the city. Indeed, as an English observer noted, 'at the best of times, the sprawling suburbs are sinister...[revealing] a crude intensity of living, a menacing activity, a human energy which quite plainly gets little or nothing of what civilisation gives as a reward - an overpowering sense of something about to explode'.<sup>38</sup> For the time being, however, the dictatorship denied the new working class the chance to form any real associational or organisational links inside the city; the new proletariat was, therefore, waiting in the wings, an unknown quantity, whose aspirations and power could not yet be truly felt.

The bourgeoisie, nevertheless, was highly fearful of the latent threat of the poorly integrated immigrant workers. Traditional bourgeois fears of the masses were sharpened by the knowledge that entire areas were populated by an immigrant working class with a distinct identity, loyalties and, in many cases, a different language. That said, neither the bourgeoisie nor the local authorities made any positive effort to ease the arrival of the immigrants in their new urban environment, just as they made no real attempt to integrate them into the fabric of Catalan life.

Bourgeois disquiet was increasingly expressed through a repulsion of the cultural, social and moral practices that demarcated the proletariat from the 'good citizens of Barcelona'. In particular, bourgeois moralists reacted against the effects of the revolution in leisure patterns that from World War One onwards had converted Barcelona into 'the Paris of the south'. This spread of leisure reinforced popular traditions of café life, which attracted workers both as a forum for sociability and as an escape from poor housing conditions. Cafés were the 'living rooms of the poor', offering camaraderie for the newly arrived immigrants from southern Spain and the Catalan provinces, as well as providing a respite from the mental and physical strains of the

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<sup>38</sup> Sirera Uliag, *Obreros*, p.33; López Sánchez, *Un verano*, p.13; John Langdon-Davis, *Behind the Spanish Barricades*, New York, 1936, pp.117-118

working day. In the wake of mass immigration, the number of bars, cabarets, cafés and dance-halls in the city mushroomed, particularly the flamenco bars in the Barri xino. Alongside the Barri xino was El Paral.lel, 'the poor man's Rambles' according to Maragall, a wide avenue running from the port that bisected some of the most desperate streets of tenement Barcelona. By the 1930s El Paral.lel had assimilated wider European and American influences, becoming the 'Broadway of Barcelona', the unrivalled centre of proletarian nocturnal revelry, housing cabarets, bars and dance-halls, drawing in *aficionados* of the recently arrived jazz and tango. The increasingly sophisticated social scene on El Paral.lel underlined the relative modernity of Barcelona and simultaneously challenged the traditional work ethic subscribed to by the Catalan bourgeoisie. In the words of Álvarez Junco, 'the district was paradigmatic of the most intense urban life in Spain at the time...nothing clashed more directly with the cultural world of the old régime'.<sup>39</sup>

This collision was accentuated by the overlap between mass leisure and organised politics. Firstly, the concern of sections of the Barcelona proletariat for the virtues of repose fostered demands for 'the three eights' (*los tres ochos*): an eight hour working day, eight hours for sleep and eight free hours for leisure and amusement. Secondly, the wonderful delights of the Barri xino and El Paral.lel attracted an essentially working class clientele, including a healthy smattering of proletarian activists and middle-class bohemians. For example, the café-concerts of El Paral.lel were a democratic, alternative to theatre, without any formal dress restrictions, that reinforced community and class identities by propagating a genuinely anti-bourgeois, popular culture through radical productions of an anti-clerical or leftist persuasion, such as Fola Igúbides' El Cristo moderno and El Sol de la Humanidad. The proletarian bohemia of the anarchists led to the establishment of countless bar and café *tertúlias*, where activists

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<sup>39</sup> Kaminski, Los de Barcelona, p.38; Temma Kaplan, Red City, Blue Period. Social Movements in Picasso's Barcelona, Berkeley, 1992, p.129; Andreu Avel·li Artís i Tomàs (Sempronio), Aquella entremaliada Barcelona, Barcelona, 1978; Domènec de Bellmunt, L'Àngel Bohemi, Barcelona, 1935 and Les Catacumbes de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1930; Josep Maria Planes, Nits de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1931; Ricard Vinyes i Ribes, 'Bohemis, marxistes, bolxevics. De la indigència a la revolució', L'Avenc, 77, 1984, pp.48-54; Álvarez Junco, El Emperador, p.399

met to discuss events. Meanwhile, during times when repression put the streets out of bounds for organised protest, proletarian militants relied more heavily on cafés as fora for discussion and clandestine meeting places, away from the reach of the security forces.<sup>40</sup>

Ever-suspicious of changes in proletarian attitudes and behaviour, the bourgeoisie regarded the new-found craving for repose of its operatives in a negative light. The morality campaigns and temperance crusades of bourgeois reformers stigmatised working class leisure patterns as the source of all vice and the harbinger of harmful passions. The raw pleasures offered by the cabarets, brothels and music-bars of the Barri xino and El Paral·lel were portrayed as a 'Dantesque inferno', a dangerous 'crime zone', that were the precursors of subversion and degeneracy. Increasingly, the upper classes expressed the consequences of social and environmental collapse as the outcome of moral laxity. Bourgeois commentators believed that the moral decay engendered by the musical bars, *cafés cantants* and other 'dens of prostitution' produced an array of social and medical ills, ranging from alcoholism, syphilis and the collapse in the institution of Christian marriage, right across to tuberculosis, cancer and even death.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, bourgeois ideologues legitimated the hierarchy of capitalist society and, in an attempt to control the working class outside the factory, they maintained that diligent labour and sobriety were the origin of all virtue. An integral component of these attempts to 'moralise' the proletariat was the concept of the 'good worker', the image of the operative as a paragon of docility and respectability, formed in the image of a pious

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<sup>40</sup> Alba, *Cataluña*, pp.186-187; Vinyes i Ribes, 'Bohemis, marxistes, bolxevics', pp.48-54; Salut, *Viveres*, p.135; Victor Serge, *The Birth of Our Power*, London, 1977, pp.29-30; Cruells, *Seguí*, p.162; José Peiró, *Peiró*, pp.33-34; Albert Pérez Baró, *Els "feliços" anys vint. Memòries d'un militant obrer, 1918-1926*, Palma de Mallorca, 1974, p.163

<sup>41</sup> Guillermo López, *Barcelona sucia. Artículos de malas costumbres. Registro de higiene*, Barcelona, n.d., pp.54-55; Tomás Caballé Clos, *La criminalidad en Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1945, pp.116-118. The labour movement argued that the repugnance of the pious bourgeoisie towards proletarian leisure was somewhat hypocritical. Firstly, it was claimed that capitalists were denying their operatives the very pleasures that were easily within the reach of the rich in the licensed casinos, 'opium dens' and brothels (*casas de tolerancia*) of the wealthy districts of Barcelona. Secondly, it was widely believed by the inhabitants of the Barri xino that respectable gentlemen constituted one of the major sources of custom for the prostitutes of the area. See, for example, *Front*, 30 July 1932.

bourgeoisie.<sup>42</sup>

Another way in which bourgeois social reformers expressed their fear of masses was through a discourse that emphasised the alienating and degenerating force of the modern city. Again, the rowdy streets in the area around El Paral·lel and the Barri xino were the major source of alarm. These panics fused with long-standing bourgeois law-and-order scares about the volatility of the dank proletarian streets of the city centre. To be sure, since the 1909 Setmana Tràgica the 'men of order' perceived the Barri xino as a potential flash-point for social discontent, in which the urban landscape of its labyrinthine streets favoured insurrectionaries. Although, after the riots of 1909, most of the wealthy chose to evacuate the downtown area of Barcelona for the security of bourgeois havens like Sarrià, Sant Gervasi and Vallvidrera, the Barri xino continued to bring panic to the 'lovers of order'. This cannot be dissociated from the dangerous proximity of this most rebellious district to the bourgeois financial and political centres in the city. For example, the Civil Governor, Madrid's representative in Barcelona, was officially housed at the Plaça de Palau, on the intersection between the Gothic Quarter (Ciutat Vella) and the port. To the West lay Vía Laietana, the Americanised business avenue that had been carved out of an area that included some of the poorest streets in the city. Symbolising the concern for order of the bourgeoisie, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional offices on Vía Laietana were opposite the main city police station. Meanwhile, just along from Vía Laietana was the Plaça de Sant Jaume, the main administrative centre of the city and site of the City Hall (*Ajuntament*), the Provincial Council Chambers (*Diputació*) and the Palau de la Generalitat, the residence of the old head of the Catalan government. Thus, these important symbols of power in the city all fell within the heart of the Gothic Quarter, just a few minutes walk from the Barri xino. Alarm that these official centres might be devoured by the surrounding streets saw the widening of Carrer de Ferran, the main approach road to the Plaça de Sant Jaume, in the

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<sup>42</sup> Artís i Tomàs, *Aquella entremaliada Barcelona* p.172; Fernando Barangó-Solís, *Reportajes Pintorescos*, Barcelona, 1934, pp.109-110; Gil Maestre, *La criminalidad*, pp.ix-x, 39; Fernando Alvarez-Uría, *Miserables y locos. Medicina mental y Orden social en la España del siglo XIX*, Barcelona, 1983, pp.308-364

last century, in the hope that this would allow the easy passage of the security forces from Les Rambles, the main thoroughfare and vertebral column of the city. Finally, epitomising the fragility of the position of the upper classes in the city, the Liceu, the Barcelona opera house and the cultural citadel of the bourgeoisie on Les Rambles, backed onto some of the meanest streets of the Barri xino.<sup>43</sup>

By the late 1920s traditional anxieties that the Barri xino was the haunt of the 'perishing classes' were now exacerbated by the bourgeois orthodoxy that the uncontrolled expansion of leisure, including that of a carnal variety, had loosened the grip of Christian morality over the area. For the occupants of the moral high ground the Barri xino was a twilight zone populated by sexual deviants and drug dealers; a 'criminal zone', full of the underworld lairs of the lawless classes, a haven of immorality that emphasised the independence of the 'dangerous classes' from the values of civilised society.

These moral fears were far from consistent. In fact, they reflected the contradictions of the capitalist city, a refraction of the acute social isolation felt by the bourgeoisie and its concern at the breakdown of traditional social solidarities and moral norms in the wake of industrialisation. Similarly, these panics underlined the alarm of the bourgeoisie at the consequences of the unregulated nature of its own economic system and the mass immigration that had multiplied the marginalised social sectors in the city and enhanced the 'ungovernability' of the proletariat. Although the bourgeoisie had *its* Barcelona in the *modernisme* of Gaudí, the Eixample and the sleepy villas of Sarrià, it had failed to construct an integrated city, what Maragall described as an 'imperial Barcelona'. Bourgeois dreams had mutated into nightmares; capitalist Barcelona had generated an array of urban tensions and another city, a proletarian city, a city that instilled the bourgeoisie with mortal fear, but yet without which its city could not survive. *Its* Barcelona was threatened by *their* city, 'the city of bombs', 'the anarchic

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<sup>43</sup> Salut, *Viveres*, pp.9-11, 52-57, 114, 123-124; Gary McDonagh, 'El Liceo, escenario de conflictos', in Sánchez (ed.), pp.80-87

city' and the sprawling new ghettos on the edge of the metropolis.<sup>44</sup>

### 1.3. The Open Wounds of Proletarian Barcelona

The key difference between Catalan workers during the first third of the twentieth century and their predecessors was provided by their syndical and cultural organisations. Many labour leaders were either auto-didacts or educated through the union-funded Ateneu system. The Ateneus produced a distinctly proletarian culture that provided tremendous support for the mass unions of the CNT and added to the separation of classes.<sup>45</sup> However, the real popularity of the CNT unions was bound up with its success in imposing restraint over their rapacious industrial masters.

Once the CNT was driven underground by the dictatorship in the 1920s, the employers were allowed *carte blanche* in the factory. Though liberated from the unions, Catalan capitalists remained shackled by the historic under-capitalisation of their industries. By 1931 Catalonia had 1,804 listed companies with total capital of 3,144 million pesetas, averaging 1.17 million pesetas capital per company. This level of capitalisation was well below that in the Basque Country, where 447 companies amassed a total capital of 1,600 million pesetas, averaging 3.6 million pesetas per company. The well-being of operatives continued to be sacrificed to the profit margins of their employers.

The undercapitalised building sites of the construction industry, often the first point of employment for unskilled immigrant labourers, provided a harsh initiation in the ways of the city. While on-the-job falls were commonplace, employers rarely provided on-site medical facilities and there were cases of injured builders waiting a full hour to receive treatment. Not surprisingly, therefore, of 30,056 industrial accidents in Barcelona province in 1930, 4,988, over one-in-six, were in the building industry. Deaths of builders were appallingly regular. Second place in the industrial accidents

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<sup>44</sup> Alejandro Sánchez, 'Manchester español, Rosa de Fuego, París del sur', in Sánchez (ed.), pp.15-22

<sup>45</sup> Pere Solà, *Els ateneus obrers i la cultura popular a Catalunya (1900-1939): L'Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular*, Barcelona, 1978, *passim*.; Josep Termes, 'Els ateneus populars: un intent de cultura obrera', *L'Avenç*, 104, 1987, pp.8-12; Léon-Ignaci, 'El pistolisme', p.24; José Peiró, *Juan Peiró*, pp.11, 14-16

league was occupied by the metal industry. Like the construction sector, metal plants also employed large numbers of unskilled operatives, and they were discernibly undercapitalised and in the most advanced workshops, like the Casa Girona, there were very poor safety standards and deaths were not uncommon. Even La Vanguardia, a bourgeois daily not known for its concern with workers' rights, was sometimes moved to condemn the years of neglect and dreadful conditions in certain workplaces.<sup>46</sup>

Terms of employment deteriorated substantially during the dictatorship. For instance, following the defeat of their 1923 claim for wage rises and a 10-hour day, the cart-drivers figured among the poorest paid sectors of the Barcelona proletariat in 1930, working a gruelling 12-hour day. Despite the claims of the dictatorship to be a régime based on 'law-and-order', employers took advantage of the benevolence of the authorities to increase the number of children in the workforce, in flagrant contravention of the legislation that prescribed such practices. In many industrial sectors insouciant employers reintroduced piece-work to intensify production not only in those industries that yielded low profits but also in some of the most advanced metalworks. For the workers, the return to denigrating forms of 'payment by results' signalled the end of fixed wages, a rise in the exploitation, a rapid deterioration in working conditions and an increase in unemployment.<sup>47</sup> According to state-wide figures from the Ministerio de Trabajo, wages fell much more swiftly in Barcelona than elsewhere in the Spanish state. This was especially marked among younger operatives and the unskilled in Barcelona, who lost ground to both their more skilled counterparts in the city and their equivalents elsewhere in the country.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Albert Balcells, *Crisis económica y agitación social en Cataluña (1930-1936)*, Barcelona, 1971, p.162, n.14; La Vanguardia, 15 August 1931; L'Opinió, 22, 26 August 1931; La Batalla, 27 June 1930, 12 March 1931; Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión, *Estadística de los accidentes de trabajo*, Madrid, 1930, pp.114-147

<sup>47</sup> La Batalla, 20 June 1930, 12 March 1931

<sup>48</sup> While a certain amount of fragmentation and stratification can always be found across the various occupational layers, the wage differentials within the Barcelona working class were exceptional. In the metal sector, where wage differentials between the skilled and the unskilled were already significant, the unskilled faced a 12% loss in pay between 1925 and 1930, alongside the 8% lost by the skilled. By 1930 skilled transport workers earned around 55 pesetas, over 20 pesetas more than their unskilled colleagues and with overtime, the skilled could take home double the pay of the unskilled. Equally, the differentials between skilled and unskilled across industries varied quite widely. The gulf between skilled and

Workplace resistance was comprehensively curtailed through the consolidation of capitalist control inside the workplace. The powers of foremen were enhanced and in an attempt to guarantee rigorous production line discipline, employers tied the wages of supervisors to the output of the workers. Overseers were allowed to fine 'bad' workers and 'slackers' and these disciplinary powers were often augmented with straightforward bullying. This hard approach came easily to the foremen who were often promoted from the mass of workers often because of their personal authoritarianism. Meanwhile, those who reneged on the solidarities of life on the shopfloor were despised as 'agents of the bosses' by those they left behind, a hatred which was fuelled in the textile sector by frequent allegations of sexual harassment from the predominantly young, female workforce.<sup>49</sup>

Outside the workplace operatives were disadvantaged by the rising cost of living. Since World War One the labour movement had expressed concern about soaring living standards and despite a limited stabilisation during the middle years of the dictatorship, prices began to rise sharply again from 1929, affecting meat, fish, vegetables and dairy produce in a particularly bad way. In February 1931 this culminated in inflation unseen in Barcelona since the post-war period, a curse that further aggravated the lot of proletarians whose static or falling wages trailed way behind the price index.<sup>50</sup>

Additional strains were placed on proletarian living conditions due to a sharp increase in rents throughout the 1920s, which rose by one-third between 1923 and 1929, as landlords exploited the housing crisis in Barcelona. Estimates of the proportion of workers' wages that went to landlords ranged from one to two-thirds. The burden of rent payments, therefore, ate up a substantial part of working class budgets and created a

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unskilled wages in the textile industry was double the differential in the iron sector. Meanwhile, employers exacerbated the occupational divisions within the working class by introducing artificial skill gradations as a means of deskilling and cutting wages. Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, pp.554, 560; Manuel Tuñón de Lara, *El movimiento obrero en la historia de España*, Madrid, 1972, pp.754-765; *La Batalla*, 29 June 1930

<sup>49</sup> Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, pp.92, 703-707; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 December 1931

<sup>50</sup> *Anuario Estadístico de España de 1931*, Madrid 1932, pp.531, 541; Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, p.568



simmering hatred among large sectors of the Barcelona proletariat towards the landlord class. In housing, as in work, it was the unskilled and predominantly immigrant working class that felt most discomfort. This was exemplified in the Barri xino, Barcelona's most overpopulated district, which housed almost one-tenth of the city's inhabitants.

Although the population density of the Barri xino exceeded 1,000 people per square kilometre, 10 times greater than the overall average for the city, rents exceeded the monthly average of 50 pesetas. As well as the sheer number of sub-divided buildings vying for space in the narrow streets of the Barri xino, problems worsened through the phenomena of 'roof-top shanties' (*barraquisme vertical*), whereby illegal flats built on the top of existing tenement slums. These practices became so extensive that by 1930 there was on average 41.2 residents per building in the Barri xino, twice the Barcelona average. Amid grinding poverty, and with numerous families sharing a single bathroom, diseases like cholera, meningitis and tuberculosis, all of a thoroughly preventable nature and linked with the deficiencies of diet and housing, were a constant danger for workers. Meanwhile, avaricious landlords taxed any possible advantages in the living conditions of their tenants. An example of this can be seen the average rent of 60 pesetas, well over the city average, charged in the potentially healthier seaside district of Barceloneta.<sup>51</sup>

Only in the outlying ghettos was it possible for unskilled workers to enjoy lower rents. In Santa Coloma de Gramanet the average monthly rent was a mere 30 pesetas, at least half that in most areas of proletarian Barcelona. Nevertheless, the possible advantages stemming from cheaper rents in the peripheral ghettos were outweighed by the barbaric social conditions in these rapidly developed areas. L'Hospitalet had the disadvantage of being the dumping ground for the haulage companies who left the untreated refuse of Barcelona to putrefy in its fields. Moreover, the housing stock in the ghettos was crude. In l'Hospitalet there were cases of 'houses' built without adequate

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<sup>51</sup> Tafunell in García Delgado (ed.), p.15; Aiguader i Miró, *El problema*, p.14; Jaume Artigues i Vidal, Francesc Mas i Palau and Xavier Sunyol i Ferrer, *El Raval. Història d'un barri servidor d'una ciutat*, Barcelona, 1980, pp.53-54; José Peiró, *Peiró*, p.45; Massana, *Indústria*, pp.22, 126-130; Lluís Claramunt i Furest, *Problemes d'urbanisme*, Barcelona, 1934, pp.14-18; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 January, 5-7, 13 August, 25 September, 10, 17 October 1931

foundations being blown away by the wind and, while the authorities deemed much housing stock to be a 'health risk', in the absence of cheap alternatives it was incapable of remedying this sad state of affairs. Another problem was the absence of any real infrastructure in the peripheral ghettos. The absence of basic modern amenities such as electricity, paved streets, drains and adequate sanitation explain the elevated incidence of typhoid in the city, reflected by figures that revealed Barcelona workers 38 times more likely to contract the disease than those in London. The same insalubrious zones inhabited by the immigrant working class were also blighted by glaucoma and trachoma. Equally, despite the construction of the various groups of *Cases Barates*, the unskilled and the unemployed still inhabited thousands of barely habitable shanties scattered around the city. Even a monarchist Council spokesperson was forced to describe the health situation in the 1920s as 'lamentable'.<sup>52</sup>

Given the condition of the Barcelona proletariat at the end of the 1920s, it is difficult to see how it corresponded with the dictator's definition of the Spanish malaise of people who 'eat much and work little' (*se come mucho y se trabaja poco*).<sup>53</sup> This is confirmed by a study of the monthly budget of a working class couple with two children in the typical proletarian district of Poblenou. In 1930 the monthly living expenses - rent, food, clothing, etc. - for a family of four was about 385 pesetas. That same year, a male textile worker earned between 7 and 10 pesetas hourly, depending on skill level. Assuming an average 26 working days per month and a 9 hour working day, the monthly income of the main breadwinner would have fallen between 182 and 260 pesetas. Of the two figures, both of which stand well below the monthly expenditure, the lower figure can be taken as the best indicator because the textile sector in Poblenou was based on unskilled labour. Under these circumstances, there were irresistible

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<sup>52</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 30 August 1931; *L'Obra*, 26 September 1931. Barcelona workers were also 22 times more likely to catch typhoid than their Berlin counterparts: Dr. Lluís Claramunt i Furest, *La pesta en el pla de Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1933, pp.6-8 and *La Lluita contra la Fibra Tifòidea a Catalunya*, Barcelona, 1933, pp.189-200, 205-206; Víctor Alba and Marià Casasús, *Diàlegs a Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1990, p.15; Rider, *Anarchism*, p.152. According to Aiguader i Miró there were nearly 1,500 shanties in 1932: *El problema*, p.6; *Adelante*, 10 January 1934

<sup>53</sup> Vila-San-Juan, *La vida cotidiana*, p.95

pressures within the proletarian family for both women and children to enter the workplace to enhance the family economy.<sup>54</sup> For such families sick days were an unaffordable luxury; family members were forced to risk injury by working when ill, and there was little possibility of saving against the danger of future unemployment, as workers were advised by rational bourgeois thinkers. Thus even in a proletarian family where both adults worked, there was a very low standard of living and contrary to the prejudiced beliefs of the upper classes, workers often ate poorly, with bread remaining the fundamental component of proletarian diets right through the 1920s.<sup>55</sup>

All of these hardships were aggravated at the beginning of the 1930s by a new and growing curse for the Barcelona proletariat: mass unemployment. After the 1929 Exhibition the economy faltered due to the slack in the building programme. Matters worsened later that year in the wake of the first impact of the world recession in Spain, which led to the fall of the dictator, the sudden end of his public works programme and a crisis in the construction sector. Economic collapse exacerbated the historic inability of Barcelona industry to provide stable employment and the traditional 'reserve army of labour' became swollen. Meanwhile, the degree of structural unemployment grew due to both the legacy of mass immigration and because labour supply always outstripped the demand generated by the sluggish Catalan economy. This huge growth in joblessness undermined the popular adage that 'the unemployed could always find work on the docks'.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, because Spanish capitalism was poorly integrated within the international capitalist system, the repercussions of the Wall Street Crash were muted. Moreover, the relatively backward Spanish industry had not seen the introduction of the same techniques of rationalised and mechanised production that had been implemented in other parts of Europe. It is also true that at no point during the inter-war years did the

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<sup>54</sup> These calculations are based on figures in Manel Arranz, Nicasi Camps, et. al., *El Poblenou: 150 anys d'història*, Barcelona, 1991, p.56 and Tuñón de Lara, *El movimiento obrero*, pp.763-764

<sup>55</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 5 June 1931

<sup>56</sup> *La Batalla*, 20 June 1930; *Comercio y Navegación*, July 1931; Juan Hernández Andreu, *España y la crisis de 1929*, Madrid, 1986, pp.115-118; 'La indústria de la construcció a Barcelona' in *Butlletí de l'Institut d'Investigacions Econòmiques*, 13, 1933, p.4

Spanish working class suffer from the same mass unemployment as their counterparts in Germany. However, the experience of joblessness and its ramifications in Spain are not best gauged in absolute terms. Certainly, as Mercedes Cabrera has argued, just because the incidence of unemployment was lower in Spain it does not mean that its effects were less.<sup>57</sup> This is particularly relevant because unlike in Britain and Germany, where there were long-standing welfare traditions, the Spanish state played a minor social function and there was not even a slowly developing corpus of welfare legislation to build on.

Similar reasoning can be employed when considering the impact of unemployment. While official statistics suggest that joblessness in Catalonia was lower than in Andalusia, Castile and the Basque Country, it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons about regional unemployment rates. Firstly, official statistics were highly unreliable. For instance, in 1930 the authorities claimed that there were 16,901 unemployed workers in the industrial cities of Barcelona province. Yet, official figures referred only to those workers who were completely out of work, thereby ignoring the rising number of semi-unemployed workers in Catalonia who mustered no more than a few days work each week. Secondly, the repressive nature of the state discouraged many immigrant workers in Catalonia from registering with official bodies. Consequently, official unemployment figures were heavily deflated and so underestimated the problem of joblessness in Catalonia. The case of Badalona is an interesting example of these problems. While official figures indicated under 2,000 unemployed workers in Badalona in 1930, in fact, misery extended into hundreds more working class homes where the major bread-winners were employed for only two or three days a week.<sup>58</sup>

For all their inconsistencies, government statistics could not obscure the sharp rise in joblessness. The crisis in the construction sector had disastrous effects on associated industries and meant that joblessness rose quickly in the important cement-

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<sup>57</sup> Mercedes Cabrera, *La patronal ante la II República. Organizaciones y estrategia, 1931-1936*, Madrid, 1983, pp.82-83; Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, p.344

<sup>58</sup> Balcells, *Crisis*, p.35; Nuria Vall i Serra, *La II República a Badalona (1931-1936). Una població industrial en crisi*, unpublished MA thesis, Barcelona University, 1987, pp.75-84; Joan Manent i Pesas, *Records d'un sindicalista llibertari català, 1916-1943*, Paris, 1976, p.153

producing towns of provincial Catalonia. The official unemployment figure for Barcelona province in 1930 revealed that the total number of jobless had double since 1928. The impact of the building crisis was especially dramatic in Barcelona city, where the enormous construction sector entered a sharp decline. By the end of 1930, around 80% of the total unemployed in Catalonia were concentrated in the capital. This trend continued into 1931 as the number of unemployed in Barcelona continued to soar, augmented by the return of immigrant workers from European nations already blighted by the economic crisis. Matters worsened as Barcelona employers responded to the uncertain economic climate with mass redundancies. At Casa Girona, the city's largest metalworks, 2,000 proletarians were dismissed on a single day in the spring of 1931.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the slowing down of the economy, the predominantly unskilled basis of industry in Barcelona continued to serve as a magnet for the hungry refugees fleeing the endemic underemployment in rural Spain. The alternative to migration - starvation in the villages of southern Spain - was hardly likely to dissuade the rural unemployed from trying their luck in the industrial north.

By 1930, therefore, the bulk of the Barcelona proletariat was in a state of desperation. The creeping impact of the recession, the absence of independent union organisations and rising prices converged to erode living standards, signifying a slow death for working class families. The limited poor relief available through either state or municipal bodies proved wholly insufficient. Emblematic of the poorly established welfare agenda of the Spanish state, the Instituto Nacional de Previsión, formed in 1927 to counteract unemployment, was totally overwhelmed. At the same time, the growth in numbers of what the upper classes regarded as the 'sunken classes' heightened competition for both the charity provided by philanthropic Church bodies and the munificence of the 'good citizens' of Barcelona in the streets. By 1931 it was estimated that unemployment affected 30,000 families in Barcelona, while 75% of all deaths in the

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<sup>59</sup> Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, p.344; *Comercio y Navegación*, June 1935; *La Batalla*, 12 March 1931; Balcells, *Crisis económica*, p.17

city were attributed to the hunger and poor diet.<sup>60</sup>

While this burgeoning 'reserve army of labour' could be seen throughout the worker districts of Barcelona, it was overwhelmingly concentrated in the shanties and the lowest grade housing stock, particularly in the Barri xino, the La Torrassa and Collblanc districts of l'Hospitalet and in the three groups of 'Cheap Houses' scattered around the periphery of the city. It was in these areas where the economic crisis merged with the pronounced urban crisis of Barcelona to generate incalculable misery and an enormous cauldron of discontent.

The political system was also in decline. At best, the dictatorship had induced an artificial social peace, a false equilibrium imposed over the virulent social context that erupted into civil war between 1918 and 1923. Meanwhile, this context had been exacerbated by the economic policies of the 1920s that created a new and despairing proletariat, based largely on immigrant workers of recent peasant origin. The new proletariat first made its collective presence felt in the city during a strike of CNT building workers in September 1930 that paralysed the entire sector. This impressive debut was followed in January 1931 by a number of clashes between police and unemployed workers as the latter attempted to march on the city centre. Emilio Mola, the head of security, conceded that 'Barcelona is the heart of the CNT'.<sup>61</sup> As social protest returned to the streets, it was evident that despite recourse to the death penalty and the censor, the dictatorship had ultimately failed to curb the armed robberies and assuage the security concerns of the 'lovers of order'.<sup>62</sup> The security forces were in a dreadful state: they were poorly funded, ill-informed, riddled with internal rivalries and corruption; they were also seriously strained by the new challenges presented by the tensions that had developed inside the city.<sup>63</sup> This was particularly true in the *Cases*

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<sup>60</sup> Instituto Nacional de Previsión, *¿Qué es el INP?*, Madrid, 1927; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 March 1931; *Tierra y Libertad*, 5 June 1931

<sup>61</sup> Dámaso Berenguer, *De la Dictadura a la República*, Madrid, 1931, pp.160, 200, 205; Sanz, *El sindicalismo español*, pp.214-244; *El Diluvio*, 31 January 1931

<sup>62</sup> *Las Noticias*, 21 September 1923; *Comercio y Navegación*, September, December 1923, January, February 1924; Vila-San-Juan, *La vida cotidiana*, pp.249-262

<sup>63</sup> Emilio Mola, *Memorias. El derrumbamiento de la monarquía*, Madrid n.d., vol.3, pp.127-135

*Barates*, the Barri xino and l'Hospitalet, the heartlands of the unemployed, where the state of anguish and social ferment was reflected in the growing criminality and illegal self-help strategies of the jobless.<sup>64</sup>

The recrudescence of 'social crime' spread new alarm among capitalists, who blamed the newly arrived immigrant workers for infringing 'the sacred rights of property'. Although the industrialists profited from the toil of the immigrants, the apparent immunity of the new operatives to traditional methods of social control drove terror into the 'captains of industry'. Bourgeois sectors viewed the coincidence between sharpening class struggle and the arrival of the newcomers as evidence that the immigrants lacked the traditional 'understanding' (*seny*) of Catalans. The *estrangement* of the bourgeoisie towards its largely immigrant operatives resurrected interest in some kind of repatriation of the 'outsiders' (*forasters*) who had made Barcelona their 'refuge'. These sentiments were heightened by the collapse of industry after 1929 and the new stress this placed on an already fragile social equilibrium.<sup>65</sup>

The traditional model of social control based on family and religious values, and kinship and natural hierarchies was incapable of cementing a social system in which the bourgeoisie offered workers little more than low wages and spiritual salvation for those who accepted their lot and abided by the law. Bourgeois opinion came to see the newly developed ghettos as terrifying 'crime zones' and looked to the Civil Guard as its saviour from those workers who did not let threats of eternal damnation prevent them from breaking the law.<sup>66</sup> These anxieties were especially acute in l'Hospitalet, where the bourgeoisie was alarmed that policing had failed to keep pace with phenomenal urban growth and security forces often had to be called to the city from Barcelona. Consequently, during the 'soft dictatorship' (*Dictablanda*) of General Dámaso Berenguer which followed Primo de Rivera, the self-confessed 'lovers of order' among the l'Hospitalet bourgeoisie petitioned the authorities for the construction of a Civil

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<sup>64</sup> *Las Noticias*, 3, 6, 14-20, 31 January, 8 February, 7, 21 March, 4-5 and 9-11 April 1931

<sup>65</sup> Graell, *La cuestión*, p.39; M.Rossell i Vilar, *La raça*, Barcelona, 1930; *Comercio y Navegación*, May 1931

<sup>66</sup> *El Día Gráfico*, 27 November 1931; *Las Noticias*, 14-20 January, 11, 30 June 1931



Guard barracks and 'a fixed police service in the district' to protect 'right-thinking individuals' from the machinations of 'evil-doers' (*maleantes*).<sup>67</sup>

However, political authoritarianism was discredited in the eyes of the Catalan bourgeoisie and their support for the 'iron surgery' of Primo de Rivera in 1923 dissipated due to his repression of *Catalanisme* and his Madrid-based centralism. While the Catalan bourgeoisie shed few tears for the ignominious fall of Primo de Rivera, the disappearance of the dictator opened up a far from certain political future and presented capitalists with an enormous dilemma. By 1931, these dilemmas were largely articulated by the Lliga, the traditional party of Catalan big business which retained its commitment to a firm policy of law-and-order. This was combined with a call from the Lliga for a more consensual system of governance, a kind of conservative democratic opening, rooted in the paternal authority of the monarch but yet which could re-legitimise the damaged credibility of the state.<sup>68</sup> Yet, while the Lliga correctly interpreted the popular desire for democracy, its political programme ignored one key reality: the connivance between the King and the dictator in 1923 effectively precluded the return to a constitutional monarchy in the 1930s.

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<sup>67</sup> Letter from the President of the Gremio de Ultramarinos y Similares de l'Hospitalet to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, April 1930, Arxiu Històric de l'Hospitalet de Llobregat (AHLL)

<sup>68</sup> Bernat Muniesa, *La burguesía catalana ante la II República española. 'Il Trovatore' frente a Wotan*, Barcelona, 1985, vol.1, pp.125-171



## Chapter 2: Republican Barcelona

### 2.1. The Catalan Republican-Populist Option

The dominant political force in 1930s Barcelona was the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC). The ERC was formed in March 1931 as an electoral coalition of the myriad small radical Catalan and Republican groups which developed in 1920s Catalonia on the wave of a groundswell of Republican and national sentiments.<sup>1</sup> The most important constituent parts of the ERC were the Estat Català of Francesc Macià i Llussà, the Partit Republicà Català of Lluís Companys and the 'Lluhíns', the supporters of Joan Lluhí i Vallescà, who were organised around the *L'Opinió* newspaper. In structural terms, the higher level of economic development and the larger urban middle class in Catalonia meant that the popular Republicanism of the ERC was largely specific to the region. Meanwhile, in conjunctural terms, the emergence of a middle class nationalist party was facilitated by the 'capitulation' of the bourgeois nationalism of the Lliga and its acceptance of the protection of the Spanish military in 1923. For many Catalan nationalists, 1923 revealed the central contradiction of the nationalism of the Lliga: its readiness to subjugate national demands to the 'social question'. The opprobrium directed at the Lliga after 1923 was instrumental in the rise of the ERC.<sup>2</sup>

The replacement of the Lliga by the ERC was not a foregone conclusion, however. The Partido Republicano Radical, known popularly as the Radicals, claimed the mantle of historic republicanism in Barcelona. Moreover, key members of the Radicals were well placed within local power structures, especially Joan Pich i Pon, the President of the COPUB, the main property owners' association in the city. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Culla i Clarà, *El catalanisme d'esquerra (1928-1936). Del grup de L'Opinió al Partit Nacionalista Republicà d'Esquerra*, Barcelona, 1977; Félix Cucurull, *Catalunya, republicana i autònoma (1931-1936)*, Barcelona, 1984, pp.53-290; Maria Dolors Ivern i Salvà, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (1931-1936)*, Montserrat, 1989, vol.1, pp.75-463, vol.2, pp.9-219; José Antonio González Casanova, *Federalismo y autonomía. Cataluña y el Estado español, 1868-1936*, Barcelona, 1979, pp.248-354. For the ERC leaders see Manuel Cruells, *Francesc Macià*, Barcelona, 1971; Lluís Aymamí i Baudina, *Macià*, Barcelona, 1933; Enric Jardí, *Francesc Macià*, Barcelona, 1991; Josep Maria Poblet, *Jaume Aiguader. Una vida "amb Catalunya i per Catalunya"*, Barcelona, 1977; Ángel Ossorio y Gallardo, *Vida y sacrificio de Companys*, Buenos Aires, 1943; Josep Canals i Aromí, *Lluís Companys: notes per a una interpretació històrica*, unpublished MA thesis, Autonomous University of Barcelona, 1974

<sup>2</sup> *La Batalla*, 16 July 1931; Muniesa, *La burguesía*, vol.1, pp.81-91; Josep Pla, *Cambó*, Barcelona, 1929, vol.2, p.41; Jordi Casassas Ymbert, *La Dictadura de Primo de Rivera (1923-1930). Textos*, Barcelona, 1983, pp.87-105. Maurín likened the relationship between Cambó, the Lliga leader, and Primo to that which linked Machiavelli and Lorenzo de Medici: Joaquim Maurín, *Los hombres de la Dictadura*, (2nd edition) Barcelona, 1977, pp.93-168

during their long years in opposition the Radicals had shown themselves to be a thoroughly opportunist party, combining an inflammatory anti-clericalism with their thinly disguised anti-*Catalaniste* agenda. Consequently, by 1930, traditional Republicanism appeared tactically and ideologically bankrupt, incapable of attracting widespread support among the workers of the city.<sup>3</sup>

Another rival to the ERC was the Acció Catalana Republicana (ACR). A liberal-bourgeois republican split from the Lliga, the ACR, like the ERC, rose up against the historic compromise of the Lliga in 1923. The ACR was bolstered by its ties with Madrid Republicanism and its support from prestigious Catalan Republicans such as Lluís Nicolau d'Olwer, the lawyer Amadeu Hurtado and La Publicitat, an influential daily newspaper in Barcelona. However, the ACR was known disparagingly by its enemies as 'the mini-Lliga' ('la Lligueta') and its appeal was limited due to the inability of its leadership to distance itself completely from its conservative past inside the Lliga. Additionally, the obsession of the ACR with the 'catalanisation' of Catalonia, above any broader social concerns, meant that the party was never likely to have real electoral appeal among the thousands of immigrant voters in Barcelona city.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the ERC averred grandiosely that it was 'the true anti-dynastic force in Catalonia' and enjoyed the backing of 'the great majority of the population'.<sup>5</sup> Though dubbed a 'political cocktail' by a communist critic, the Esquerra was united by a common hatred of the dictatorship and an acute awareness of the need to break the grip imposed on Catalonia by the Spanish state. Moreover, the Esquerra coalition gained a certain cohesion from its network of district organisations and grass-roots nationalist clubs in Barcelona.<sup>6</sup>

The Esquerra has been described by Maria Dolors Ivern i Salvà as an 'inter-classist' or populist party. This definition is frequently combined with an assumption that the ERC drew support from all sectors of society. According to Ivern i Salvà, the

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<sup>3</sup> Octavio Ruíz Manjón, El Partido Republicano Radical, 1908-1936, Madrid, 1976, *passim.*, Alvarez Junco, El Emperador, *passim.*, Romero Maura, "La Rosa de Fuego", *passim.*; Connelly Ullman, The Tragic Week, pp.85-102, 114-116; Andreu Nin, Los problemas de la revolución española, Barcelona, 1977, pp.127-130

<sup>4</sup> Alba, Cataluña, pp.230-231

<sup>5</sup> L'Opinió, 27 March 1931

<sup>6</sup> La Batalla, 26 March 1931

Esquerra 'did not defend any single social class nor any specific social interests'. Nevertheless, certain generalisations can be made about the supporters of the ERC. Firstly, the view of the ERC as a truly 'inter-classist' party is undermined by the fact that a lowly 3% of the party leadership was of proletarian origin. Instead, the party leadership was firmly rooted in the urban nationalist intelligentsia, especially among lawyers, who outnumbered workers 6-to-1, and by doctors and the liberal professions. That the Esquerra was not a representative formation is, in fact, illustrated by the leadership profile provided by Ivern i Salvà, which reveals that of the 132 activists that constituted the élite of the party, 130 (98.5%) were male, of whom nearly 20% were lawyers. In the cities, the Esquerra had a stable base of support among the immediate social superiors of the working class: the commercial urban middle class of small property owners and shopkeepers, extending across to businessmen and small-scale factory-owners. Overall, some 10% of the ERC leadership was made up of small businessmen.<sup>7</sup>

The other key social foundation of the Esquerra was the staunchly nationalistic tenant farmers or *rabassaires* and their union, the Unió de Rabassaires (U. de R.).<sup>8</sup> Companys, who helped organise the U. de R. in the 1920s, enjoyed a decisive influence over the farmers. Meanwhile, the farmers saw the Esquerra as a crucial counter-balance against the Lliga and the Institut Agrícola de Sant Isidre, the main representative of large-scale agricultural interests. The celebration by the Esquerra of the values of the thrift and hard work of the tenant farmers, along with their general concern for the 'small man', suited the mentality of the *rabassaires*. Equally, the mystification by the ERC of the countryside as the spiritual backbone of the nation was a powerful motif for the tenant farmers. Alongside the modernising features of *Catalanisme*, therefore, a

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<sup>7</sup> Ivern i Salvà, *Esquerra*, vol.1, pp.78-80, vol.2, pp.288, 291-294, 299. A window on the Esquerra was provided by its slate for the April 1931 municipal elections in Barri xino, where the Esquerra fielded two journalists, a lawyer and a small industrialist. Meanwhile, of the 33 ERC candidates in Barcelona city there were eight lawyers, five journalists, three small manufacturers, five small traders, four doctors, two engineers and a university professor.

<sup>8</sup> The name *rabassaires* came from the *rabassa morta* (literally translated as 'dead stump'), the pattern of land tillage that was largely specific to Catalonia. According to this system, tenancy contracts were valid for the lifetime of the vines. Thus, when the vines died, new contracts had to be negotiated between landowners and tenants. See Albert Balcells, *El problema agrari a Catalunya. La qüestió rabassaire (1890-1936)*, Barcelona, 1982.

strong rural content remained within the political ideology of the ERC. This same rustic theme was evident in 'Els Segadors', the Catalan national anthem, that lauded the sickle, the characteristic agricultural tool of the relatively well-off rabassaires. To be sure, 'Els Segadors' offered no celebration of the tools common to the trades of the industrial proletariat. In fact, while the Esquerra had an established presence in some of the more traditional working class districts like Gràcia and apart from support from the CADCI, a cultural-professional body hegemonic among the 150,000 white-collar and shop workers, the party had no coherent source of support within the organised proletariat. The ERC did enjoy close contacts with the Unió Socialista de Catalunya, a moderate Fabian-socialist split from the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), however, the Unió Socialista de Catalunya (USC) was a tiny, élitist party, with no real influence in the industrial working class of Barcelona.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the specific gravity of the proletariat in Catalan society, the ERC was eager to enlist the support of the 700,000-strong industrial workers for its plan for political modernisation. The middle class nationalists were obsessed with visions of a socially harmonious democracy and they believed that the success or failure of their political project depended on the extent to which the trade unions could be integrated within the democratic fabric of the new Catalonia. L'Opinió was convinced that only with the civilisation of political life would it be possible to 'make Catalonia a European nation' within the wider community of nations. More specifically, the radical nationalist petit bourgeoisie and their social-democratic allies in the USC viewed the problem of industrial violence as one of the historic barriers to the evolution of a rich civic culture.<sup>10</sup>

In order to integrate the proletariat within their new democratic project the ERC coalition issued a series of promises to the working class. These included a new judicial

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<sup>9</sup> Manuel Lladonosa and Joaquim Ferrer, 'Nacionalisme català i reformisme social en els treballadors mercantils a Barcelona entre 1903 i 1939. El CADCI', in Albert Balcells (ed.), Teoría y práctica del movimiento obrero en España (1900-1936), Valencia, 1977, pp.283-329; Ricard Alcaraz i González, La Unió Socialista de Catalunya, Barcelona, 1987; Miquel Caminal, Joan Comorera. Catalanisme i Socialisme (1913-1936), Barcelona, 1984, 2 vols.; Josep Lluís Martín i Ramos, Els Orígens del Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (1930-1936), Barcelona, 1977

<sup>10</sup> Butlletí Trimestral de la Conselleria d'Economia, 2, January 1937, p.44; L'Opinió, 9 June 1928, 14 November 1930, 27 August 1931; Justícia Social, 16, 30 January, 6, 20 February 1926

deal for the masses, such as 'the recognition of unrestricted individual and collective freedoms' and 'equality before the law', both of which had been long-ignored by past régimes. Similarly, the ERC 'Programme of Government' offered a range of civil liberties, including press freedoms 'without subjection to prior censorship', 'the right to free and obligatory education', 'the freedom of travel and choice of abode', 'the inviolability of residence', 'the rights of petition, meeting, association, demonstration and strike' and 'equality before the law'. This was to be accompanied by 'the humanisation of the penal system' and the transformation of jails from places of torture into 'true reformatories where the criminal is converted into a useful citizen for humanity'.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the monarchists, the Republicans believed that illegality was linked to social questions and they attributed its increase in the early part of 1931 to 'a general state of economic misery' which, they claimed, underlined the need for rapid socio-economic change. The Republicans also broke with the traditional orthodoxy that crime was the pursuit of a single class. When *L'Opinió* spoke of the 'gangsters of Barcelona', it referred to monarchist politicians who raised corruption in municipal life to Chicago levels by profiting and speculating in the Council during the dictatorship. Pledges were made that once in power the Republicans would initiate a thorough reform of the police, whose abusive practices had been condemned in the Republican press for years. The Esquerra even pledged to create a 'civic guard' to guarantee public security and end the system of policing based on informers. Meanwhile, the Republican daily *El País* denounced the 'vicious' and 'infamous' *quintzenes* system of internment without trial as 'governmental terrorism', while *L'Opinió* concluded its survey of monarchist policing by noting the 'misfortune' that traditionally the security forces were 'regularly directed against honourable people'. *L'Opinió* also attacked the 'third degree' as 'illegal pressure' by a police force which 'believes that its mission is not to detain the guilty parties, but to prove the guilt of their detainees'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *L'Opinió*, 2 April, 13 March, 29 August 1931; *El Escándolo*, 15 July 1926

<sup>12</sup> *Las Noticias*, 3, 6, 14-20, 31 January, 8 February, 7, 21 March, 4-5 and 9-11 April 1931; *L'Opinió*, 8 April, 30 October, 26 June 1931; *Decree of the Comité Revolucionari de l'Hospitalet*, 14 April 1931 (AHLL); *El País* cited in Trinidad Fernández, *La defensa*, p.311

For the 'Lluhíns', the left-wing of the ERC coalition, legal change was a necessary prerequisite for the realignment of the labour movement. The 'Lluhíns' hoped that the years of dictatorship would pacify the spirits of the most revolutionary sectors of the proletariat, thereby creating the basis for a coalition between the progressive middle classes and the organised labour movement. This hope was based on the stereotype of an inherently dignified worker who, it was believed, rejected extremist solutions in favour of 'good sense' ('seny'). Linked to this belief was the assumption that extremist ideologies - especially anarchism - had hitherto impeded the emergence of a truly progressive Catalonia. Obsessed with the British pattern of labour politics, the 'Lluhíns' dreamt of the formation of a new political party capable of establishing a relationship with the CNT parallel to that of the Labour Party and the British Trades Union Congress which would herald a new type of 'workerism' ('obrerisme'). To this end, L'Opinió called on Republicans to show a clear commitment to reformist elements within the CNT.<sup>13</sup>

'Workerism' had a high profile in the statutes of the Esquerra, which identified the duty of the state 'to legislate especially for the working class' to produce 'a better and more rational organisation of work and production'. The rejection of the revolutionary traditions of the labour movement was an important common denominator within the various elements of the ERC coalition. Unlike past politicians, however, the Esquerra envisaged that revolution would be transcended not by the repression of the organised working class but, through the full recognition of legitimate proletarian aspirations. Jaume Aiguader i Miró, a leading figure from Estat Català faction of the ERC and later the first mayor of Republican Barcelona, regularly invoked 'workerism' and praised the virtues of working class demands. He also believed that the English model of labour organisation could be emulated within a democratic Catalonia, under the guidance of the 'collectivist and class organisation' of Estat Català. Other Estat Català militants even spoke out in favour of 'workers' democracy'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> L'Opinió, 9 June 1928, 15 August, 12 December 1930; Culla i Clarà, El catalanisme, pp.33-60; Joan Culla i Clarà, 'Joan Lluhí i Vallesca o la frustració d'un Laborisme', Serra d'Or, February, 1978, pp.141-145

<sup>14</sup> Jaume Aiguader i Miró, Catalunya i la Revolució, Barcelona, 1931, pp.148-149; L'Opinió, 30 January, 13 February 1931

Despite asseverations by the L'Opinió group that 'the majority of its supporters' hailed from the labour movement, the ERC was not universally 'workerist'. Although there was a consensus among the components of the ERC coalition that labour deserved a 'new deal', the aspirations of most shades of Catalan Republican opinion did not extend as far as the 'Lluhíns'. In fact, the right-wing and the centre of the ERC coalition had little difficulty blocking attempts by the 'Lluhíns' to define the populist-nationalist coalition as a 'class' or 'socialist' party, just as they neutralised attempts at adopting a more radical social policy.<sup>15</sup> Yet 'workerism' and the promises of broad social change were central to attracting working class votes. Aware that the proletariat had traditionally associated *Catalanisme* with the bourgeois Lliga, the Esquerra stressed the importance of 'harmonising the idea of Catalonia with the repair of social injustices' and insisted that 'the sacrifices made for the freedom of our land would be hapless if it does not also accompany justice for its people'. For this reason, Macià added, 'we are sincerely workerist and catalanist'. Just a month before the April 1931 municipal elections, L'Opinió resounded with an ideology of social justice and promises of 'deliverance' and 'liberation' from the historic oppression of the Catalan people. Macià meanwhile inveighed against successive monarchical régimes, under which 'democracy and freedom have never been real' and promised to redress the decades of abuses of power. In contrast, the Esquerra leader declared, 'we stand for all civil rights for Catalonia: full democratic and press freedoms, the repeal of special powers, trial by jury, the separation of church from state'. Finally, Macià pledged himself 'to change the organisation of society to value labour as the highest rank...socialising production and the means of creating and making property unique to the collectivity'.<sup>16</sup>

Given their growing economic hardships, workers could not fail to be impressed by Esquerra promises to enact anti-inflation measures and tie wages to the cost of living. The new party advocated fundamental legal advances for workers like the establishment of a minimum wage and health legislation. Although suggestions by the L'Opinió group that the party statutes include a commitment to full unemployment

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<sup>15</sup> L'Opinió, 13 February, 29 August 1931

<sup>16</sup> L'Opinió, 13 March 1931

insurance came to nothing, the Esquerra did advocate restrictions on the length of the working day and publicly accepted the desirability of establishing the 6 hour day in those industries worst affected by the recession. Moreover, the ERC electoral programme, which promised workers 'the right to live with complete security and dignity' and enjoy 'the fruits of that labour', was widely interpreted as a commitment to unemployment benefit and/or a public works programme. The Esquerra also displayed a concern for cultural as well as the economic aspects of proletarian life and vowed to introduce 'a reduction in the working day' for the 'greater moral and economic independence of the workers, thereby allowing them to develop intellectually'. In similar vein, Llibertat, the Estat Català newspaper in l'Hospitalet, declared it was 'ready to do anything' for the proletariat. Many ERC figures took an active interest in working class living conditions. Aiguader i Miró, a doctor by profession and known as 'the people's physician', penned a series of pamphlets on a range of issues facing the proletariat, including the impact of housing conditions on ill-health. Meanwhile, Macià had already issued his famous pledge to provide the workers with 'houses and gardens' ('la caseta i l'hortet').<sup>17</sup> *Tout court*, ERC propaganda aroused enormous expectations among broad sectors of the working class that a vote for the Republicans would at best be the prelude to a new era and at least bring sweeping advances in their living standards.

The colourful rhetoric of the various components of the ERC reveals how the party meant different things to its different factions. The 'Lluhíns' sometimes saw the ERC as a 'class party', while the more moderate elements saw it as 'a party of pure and genuine liberal ideology'. Although the ERC is best defined as populist, rather than 'workerist', it can also be seen how the Esquerra responded to the concrete aspirations of the radicalised petit bourgeoisie. This was recognised at the time by Jordi Arquer, a prominent Marxist critic of the ERC, who defined it as 'a class party: of the vacillating

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<sup>17</sup> L'Opinió, 13 March, 29 August, 3, 11 December 1931; Llibertat, 20 February, 20 March 1931; Jaume Aiguader i Miró, El problema, La lleialtat a l'època, Barcelona, 1929 and La fatiga obrera, Barcelona, 1929; Alba, Cataluña, p.147; Cruells, Macià, p.159



middle class, doubtful, undefined, more on the side of the bourgeoisie, however, than of the people'.<sup>18</sup>

There is little doubt that the politics of the ERC were infused with the typical idealism of the nationalist middle class intelligentsia of their day. An example of this can be seen in the blind faith the Esquerra placed in the recuperative properties of national self-determination. This was matched with the utopian expectation that independence would lead *ipso facto* to the end of both national and class oppression. Yet under close scrutiny, the emphasis on the national question far outstripped the social reformism of the ERC. In substantive terms, this new Republicanism did not extend radically beyond the strategy for modernisation and national reconstruction of the bourgeois-nationalist Lliga.<sup>19</sup> What was distinct, was the populist rhetoric of the Esquerra, which reflected a desire to integrate the working class into a flexible bourgeois democracy based on a market economy. Thus, within the liberal variant of *Catalanisme* of the nationalist middle classes there was an implicit attempt to arbitrate between the two main classes of society and integrate the whole of society in a new political system, thereby avoiding the social polarisation that had engulfed society in the past.

It was the attempt by the Esquerra to combine the yearning for prosperity of the middle class with the desire for order of the bourgeoisie and the sentiments of equality associated with the working class that produced the considerable contradictions in the policy documents and propaganda of the new party. The founding statutes of the ERC were equally vague. For instance, normally the ERC espoused a basic bourgeois-democratic political programme, based on the same 'separation of powers' which it believed underpinned the American Revolution. However, the Esquerra sometimes combined this with a rhetoric borrowed from the Russian Revolution, as evinced by its commitment to 'the progressive transformation of the existing system of private property' in order to make 'the economic exploitation of man by man impossible'.

Mixing historical metaphors even further, ten days before the April Council elections

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<sup>18</sup> *L'Opinió*, 3 April 1931; *L'Hora*, 1 April 1931; *La Batalla*, 26 March 1931. Arquer also described the Esquerra as a disparate party of the 'maladjusted, sceptics, failures and snobs.'

<sup>19</sup> *La Veu de Catalunya*, 23 December 1930

the ERC defined itself in jacobin fashion as 'the party of the revolution', that would initiate 'the liberation of the nation, not only from the interference of the Church, but also from capitalist control'. However, as the ERC made clear on another occasion, the party did not seek 'the destruction of capitalism' but, full bourgeois-democratic freedoms and the construction of a welfare state from above, based on 'the popular will of the people, from below'.<sup>20</sup>

Out of power, the lack of coherence in the ERC ideological project, not to mention its ill-defined commitment to reform, was a source of strength. Certainly, in the April 1931 municipal elections the ability of the ERC to mean different things to different people drew in electoral support from diverse, and antagonistic social sectors.

Another reason for the appeal of the Esquerra was the sheer prestige of its leader. At first sight it appears anachronistic that the septuagenarian Macià, affectionately known to many of his fellow Catalans as 'L'Avi' ('The Grandfather'), should be at the helm of a modernisation programme aimed at ushering in the *renaixença* of Catalonia. From a conservative, landowner background, Macià reached the rank of Colonel in the Spanish army, before his celebrated resignation from the armed forces in protest at anti-Catalan sentiment among the army officers' corps. Thereafter, Macià proudly laid claim to a record of militant, sometimes armed, opposition to both the monarchy and the dictatorship. The sustained attacks launched against Macià by conservative socio-political forces tended to reaffirm his credibility, suggesting that he was the harbinger of real change. This image was consolidated by Macià's direct form of oratory that conveyed an image of trustworthiness that the masses had rarely seen in past politicians. Consequently, by the first part of 1931 Macià veritably encapsulated the rejection of Madrid centralism by the Catalan masses. At the same time, he embodied the confused and inchoate aspirations for change of a majority of Catalans during the years of the monarchy, exemplified in his own combination of 'workerist' overtures with traditional nationalist demands.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> L'Opinió, 29 August, 2 April, 13 March 1931

<sup>21</sup> Cruells, *Macià*, pp.17-32. See also Aymamí i Baudina, *Macià, passim*.; Jardí, *Macià, passim*.

Most significantly of all, the muddled hopes articulated by Macià found an echo inside the CNT. The Jacobin rhetoric periodically employed by Macià and his demagogic knack of deflecting popular discontent with the pace of change through blood-curdling rhetorical interventions was almost certainly a magnet for many elements from inside the CNT. This verbal maximalism was heard before the April elections when Macià announced his readiness for a separatist solution if the electorate from the rest of the Spanish state chose a government that was inconsistent with the will of the Catalan masses. Similarly, while Macià was clearly committed to the peaceful, electoral road and, despite his boasts to the contrary, had proved capable of only token military opposition to the monarchy, he nevertheless issued a manifesto in March 1931 declaring that 'the freedom of Catalonia must come from a profound convulsion (*capgirament*) to eliminate all hostile forces: monarchy, conservative institutions and reactionary organisations'. On a different occasion he cried that 'we are ready to conspire (*confabular-nos*) with the rebels against oppression and tyranny...but never will we accept a deal or contact with oppressors and despots'. Solidaridad Obrera, the Barcelona-based daily newspaper of the CNT, spoke of its 'admiration' for Macià's 'idealism', describing him as a 'great man', a living 'apostle of Catalan freedom'. At the founding congress of the ERC in March 1931 Macià ostentatiously embraced the correspondent of Solidaridad Obrera.<sup>22</sup>

Other ERC leaders also carried influence over the CNT. The experience of political exclusion from the institutions of the constitutional monarchy and the repression under the dictatorship, had thrown many Republicans, radical separatists and labour militants together, as their struggles overlapped against their common enemy. Many of the radical middle-class lawyers, like Companys, had provided legal representation for the CNT in the 1920s, and shared a background of suffering with the *cenetistas* during the years of arbitrary justice, deportations and terror by the *Sindicatos Libres*. Like Companys, Joan Casanoves, another leading Esquerra activist and a former

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<sup>22</sup> L'Opinió, 13 March 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 11, 19-20 March, 25-26 April 1931

CNT lawyer, was widely respected for his eloquent defence of trade union rights.<sup>23</sup> Finally, during the period immediately preceding the birth of the Republic, the various opponents of the régime had been thrown together in exile, in Paris and Brussels, the two centres of Catalan resistance to the dictatorship, and in jail, where *cenetistas* and radical *Catalanistes* engaged in long polemics about how they would defeat their immediate enemies and arrived at a certain level of understanding. The CNT press remembered Aiguader i Miró as a 'distinguished' individual from the era when he flirted with anarchism and from the dictatorship, when his Sants surgery served as a clandestine meeting place for Republicans and *cenetistas* alike.<sup>24</sup>

The standing of the ERC was enhanced further by a current within the CNT which felt that the impasse in which the union found itself before the 1923 coup d'état could only be overcome by a new reformist strategy. Many of these disaffected CNT activists viewed the ERC as a suitable vehicle for this reformist path. A small group of veteran *cenetistas* headed by Pere Foix and Martí Barrera, though quite insignificant in numerical terms, joined the Esquerra and continued to enjoy the respect of both the Confederal rank-and-file and many non-affiliated workers. Another feather in the 'workerist' cap of the Esquerra was the support it received from Hel·lení Seguí, the daughter of Salvador Seguí, the most popular CNT leader ever, who had been murdered by members of the Sindicatos Libre in 1923.<sup>25</sup>

Even among the more class-conscious workers, who were more sceptical about the reforming zeal of the ERC, it is likely that the repeated declarations in favour of broad new freedoms fostered the conviction that a Republican triumph at the polls would ensure legal conditions that would favour the expansion of real proletarian organisation and syndical mobilisation. Put another way, even if the ERC were to prove

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<sup>23</sup> Cruells, *Seguí*, pp.141-144; Joaquim Ferrer, *Un líder socialista: Layret (1880-1920)*, Barcelona, 1973, pp.199-226; Manuel Buenacasa, *El movimiento obrero español, 1886-1926. Historia y crítica*, (2nd edition) Madrid, 1977, pp.78-81

<sup>24</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 July 1931; Maximiano García Venero, *Historia del nacionalismo catalán (1793-1936)*, Madrid, 1944, pp.466-467; Juan García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos. El anarcosindicalismo...en la calle...en el Comité de Milicias...en el gobierno...en el exilio*, Barcelona, 1978, p.98; Aiguader i Miró, *Catalunya*, p.41; Mola, *Memorias*, vol.1, pp.177-178

<sup>25</sup> *L'Opinió*, 10 March 1933. The CNT was irked by these 'defections', especially that of Seguí's daughter, because the relatives of those fallen in the struggle against capital had tremendous symbolic importance in Confederal circles.

incapable of changing the lot of the working class, it was believed that it would at least guarantee the necessary civil rights to allow trade unionists to pursue collective struggles towards that same end. In the light of ERC policy statements, this was not an unreasonable expectation. To be sure, consistent with the ERC hope of attaining a *modus vivendi* with organised labour, the party had stated unequivocally that the trade union was 'the most powerful and effective instrument upon which the proletariat can rely for the attainment of its economic demands'. This formal recognition of the role of trade unions, hitherto so bitterly combated by the authorities, was matched with a desire to allow 'effective legal protection', including 'the union freedom and right to strike'. Moreover, in a forthright overture to the CNT, the ERC advocated support for 'the free play in the economic struggle' and vowed to dismantle the hated *Comités paritarios*, the arbitration courts established by the dictatorship to oversee industrial relations.<sup>26</sup> Given the implacable hostility of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT to all types of corporatism and its public rejection of all state intervention in industrial relations, the ERC had effectively met one of the major demands of the sleeping-giant of Catalan trade unionism, something that was highly convenient in terms of attracting votes from *cenetistas*.

## 2.2. The fault lines of the CNT

It would be wrong to suggest that the CNT rank-and-file was simply deceived by ERC demagogy. Instead, the attraction of the middle class *Esquerra* for the anarcho-syndicalist CNT raises a series of fundamental questions about the nature of *cenetismo*.

In 1931 there were three main factions inside the Catalan CNT. The largest of these was the anarcho-syndicalists. Having emerged as a discernible trend in the labour movement around the turn of the century, the anarcho-syndicalists reflected an attempt to find a way out of the ghetto into which the anarchist movement had been led by acolytes of 'propaganda of the deed'. In essence, anarcho-syndicalism aimed to transcend the fatal isolation of the libertarian movement from the masses or, in the words of French anarcho-syndicalist Pierre Monatte, it 'recalled anarchism to the

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<sup>26</sup> *L'Opinió*, 29 August 1931

awareness of its working class origins'.<sup>27</sup> Highly popular with trade unionists and rank-and-file workers, the anarcho-syndicalists very quickly outnumbered the traditional anarchists and waves of emigration and exile saw anarcho-syndicalist movements emerge in all the Latin American Republics, especially Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay. This allowed for a regular exchange of ideas among émigrés and endowed anarcho-syndicalism with a pan-Iberian outlook.

The two most prominent anarcho-syndicalists at this time were Joan Peiró and Ángel Pestaña, two battle-hardened *cenetistas*, both of whom had been anarchist *énragés* in their younger days. Of the two, Pestaña was the most able organiser, while Peiró was unquestionably the most sophisticated anarcho-syndicalist theoretician in Spain.<sup>28</sup> Peiró was acutely aware of the tactical limitations of the CNT in the past, especially before the 1923 coup d'état, when the unions failed to offer clear alternatives. Even though he regarded the ultimate goal of the CNT as 'anarchist communism', Peiró was highly critical of the anarchist gunmen who believed that violence was enough to bring the revolution. Instead, as a classical anarcho-syndicalist, he saw the revolution as an essentially constructive exercise, organising stable workplace committees that would lay the basis for the post-revolutionary economy. He was also critical of the attitude of many anarchists towards the CNT, accusing them of seeking to impose their 'dictatorship' over the Confederation. These concerns were amplified by Pestaña, who maintained that the unions should be free from interference by outside political bodies and he called on the anarchists to respect the sovereignty of the unions by working inside the CNT on an individual basis, rather than in organised groups.<sup>29</sup>

The majority of the anarcho-syndicalist leaders were, like Peiró and Pestaña, older militants, the very activists who in psychological terms had been most affected by the anti-Confederal repression launched by the Sindicatos Libres and the dictatorship in the 1920s. In fact, most of their number had figured, at one time or another, on Libre death-lists and some, such as Pestaña and Pere Massoni, carried bullet scars from failed

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<sup>27</sup> Cited in James Joll, *The Anarchists*, London, 1979, p.187

<sup>28</sup> José Peiró, *Peiró, passim.*; Joan Peiró, *Escrips, 1917-1939*, Barcelona, 1975; Pestaña, *Lo que aprendí, passim.*; Ángel María de Lera, *Ángel Pestaña: retrato de un anarquista*, Barcelona, 1978, *passim.*

<sup>29</sup> Joan Peiró, *Trayectoria de la CNT*, (2nd edition) Madrid, 1979, especially pp.105-184; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17, 25 April 1924; *Acción*, 23 August 1930

assassination attempts. Moreover, while many anarchists went into exile in 1923, the bulk of the anarcho-syndicalists remained in Catalonia with the union rank-and-file to face the music during the wilderness years of the dictatorship, witnessing the near complete disarticulation of the CNT and the expansion of the *Libres* under the protection of the dictator. Organisers like Peiró were the veritable engine of the CNT, putting in seven or eight hours at the union office, after a day in the workshop. Unbowed by the threat of imprisonment, Peiró ran the daily gauntlet of the police to keep the organisation alive. He headed the clandestine Catalan Regional Federation of the CNT which, due to the disarticulation of all other directive union bodies, operated as the *de facto* National Committee.<sup>30</sup>

Following its relegalisation in 1930, the resuscitation of the CNT in many parts of Barcelona was the work of the 'Solidaridad' ('Solidarity') group, made up of anarcho-syndicalists militants of national standing like Peiró and Pestaña, and activists like Juan López, Peiró's closest ally, Francesc Arin, Progreso Alfarache and Pere 'Delaville' Foix.<sup>31</sup> When Solidaridad Obrera reappeared in April 1930 members of 'Solidaridad' dominated the editorial board: the auto-didact Peiró was editor, assisted by Foix, Sebastià Clara and Massoni. Meanwhile, the 'Solidaridad' group and its supporters also enjoyed a majority on the CNT National Committee, the Catalan Regional Committee and the Barcelona Local Federation.<sup>32</sup>

The experience of navigating a path through the restricted freedoms open to the CNT between 1930-1931 convinced many of the anarcho-syndicalists that a wide degree of institutional democracy was a necessary guarantee for union freedom. This view was further underlined by international events and the emergence of authoritarian régimes in Italy, Argentina and much of Eastern Europe confirmed to the anarcho-syndicalists the need to have friends in the democratic camp. It was the combination of these domestic and international contexts that predisposed the anarcho-syndicalists towards the ERC in 1931. While the prescriptions of their apolitical ideology dissuaded

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<sup>30</sup> José Peiró, *Peiró*, pp.18, 40-47

<sup>31</sup> Eulàlia Vega i Massana, *El Trentisme a Catalunya. Divergències ideològiques en la CNT (1930-1933)*, Barcelona, 1980, pp.46-53

<sup>32</sup> *Acción*, 12 July 1930

the CNT leadership from directly counselling a course of electoral action, they argued that the issue should be left to the discretion of individual workers. In practice, however, the anarcho-syndicalist CNT leadership created a climate that favoured the ERC. This took place in a number of diverse ways. Firstly, the CNT was involved with the anti-monarchical opposition and adhered to a series of joint manifestos and amnesty rallies. Secondly, the position of the ERC was strengthened by the press campaigns of Solidaridad Obrera, who launched a virulent tirade against the 'fascist' Lliga, focussing on Cambó's nefarious capitulation to Madrid and his role as 'the father of the terrorists of the Sindicato Libre'. More openly, Solidaridad Obrera described the ERC as collectively 'the most distinguished men of Catalan democracy'. Finally, leading representatives from the anarcho-syndicalists publicly declared their respect for Macià. Juan López, a leading member of the 'Solidaridad' group, described him as 'honourable' and 'dignified', with a 'clean political history'. Some CNT leaders openly endorsed electoral politics at mass meetings with ERC and Republican speakers and in the prelude to the elections Esquerra meetings were advertised in the 'Gacetilla', the classified section of the CNT daily.<sup>33</sup>

The support lent to a political party by the CNT leadership was discordant with the abstentionist rituals and the class conscious motifs of anarcho-syndicalism. Nevertheless, as the April 1931 municipal elections approached, an amnesty for its imprisoned supporters and the practical need to end the dictatorship to allow for the full expansion of syndicalist practice were the overriding concerns of the Confederation.<sup>34</sup> Under these circumstances, the maintenance of their ideological purity and a policy of electoral abstention were unacceptable as they would leave the dictatorial right in power and the prisoners in jail. The only possibility open to the CNT leaders, therefore, however difficult to accept, was to vote for the Republic as a 'lesser evil'. This had already been recognised at the CNT National Plenum in Blanes in April 1930, where a

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<sup>33</sup> Acción, 5 July 1930; Solidaridad Obrera, 11-12, 19- 21, 26 March, 1, 25-26 April, 22 May 1931

<sup>34</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 20, 26-27 February, 18, 25-27 March 1931



resolution was adopted which accepted limited collaboration between the unions and the Republicans.<sup>35</sup>

The stance of the anarcho-syndicalists was not immune to criticism, however, and opposition came from the anarchists within the CNT. The anarchists conceived of revolution as an essentially spontaneous act, which did not require the intervention of the trade unions, which were feared as the harbingers of bureaucracy. This aversion to trade unions also reflected the desire of the anarchists to liberate the whole of humanity, not just the proletarian part that so interested the anarcho-syndicalists. Consequently, the anarchist quest for liberation meant a campaign against all social conventions, prejudices and morals that enslaved humanity in the broadest sense, not just the economic forces that oppressed workers. At the same time, anarchism was also a reaction to the system that spawned industrial workers. Many anarchists accepted a philosophy that looked longingly backwards at an idyllic, pre-capitalist, rural past, like the advocates of a 'return to the countryside' in Imperial Russia.<sup>36</sup>

The centre for anarchist revolutionary activity was the *grupo de afinidad*. The origins of these *grupos* lie in the anarchist discussion groups designed to heighten libertarian consciousness. Bound together on the basis of personal affinity and mutual loyalty, the *grupistas* pledged to live life according to libertarian principles, irrespective of the restrictions imposed by capitalist society. The *grupos* reaffirmed the separation of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie, and prized the attributes of individual rebellion, generating a strong culture of resistance to the daily rituals of capitalist society. This was reflected in the names of *grupos* like 'Los Desheredados' ('The Disinherited'), 'Los Indomables' ('The Uncontrollables') and 'Els Fills de Puta' ('The Bastards'). Although it is unlikely that the number of anarchist *grupistas* in Barcelona in the 1920s ever exceeded 200, they acquired tremendous influence in the CNT due to the importance of

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<sup>35</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 January 1931; Bernat Pou and Jaume Magriñá, *Un año de conspiración (antes de la República)*, Barcelona, 1933, pp.159-162; Vega i Massana, *El Trentisme*, pp.54-62; Francesc Madrid, *Els exiliats de la Dictadura. Reportatges i testimonis*, Barcelona, 1930, *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> Xavier Paniagua, *La sociedad libertaria. Agrarismo e industrialización en el anarquismo español, 1930-1939*, pp.83-91, 104-110; Isaac Puente, *El comunismo libertario. Sus posibilidades de realización en España*, Valencia, n.d.; Agustí Segarra, *Federico Urales y Ricardo Mella, teóricos del anarquismo español*, Barcelona, 1977; Federico Urales, *Los municipios libres. Ante las puertas de la anarquía*, Barcelona, 1933; *La Revista Blanca*, 19 April 1934

their syndical self-defence functions. It was this growing voice that raised the spectre of the 'dictatorship' of the *grupistas* which so alarmed the anarcho-syndicalists.

The most important of the *grupos* from the 1920s was 'Los Solidarios'. Constituted by Buenaventura Durruti, Francisco and Domingo Ascaso, Aurelio Fernández, Gregorio 'El Torinto' Suberbiela, Alfonso Miguel, Marcelino del Campo, Miguel García Vivancos, Ricardo Sanz García, Juan García Oliver and Ramón Torres Escartín, all the component parts of 'Los Solidarios' described themselves as committed, 'pure' anarchists.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, 'Los Solidarios' were also known as 'anarcho-bolsheviks' due to their obsession with the 'seizure of power' by a 'revolutionary army', their belief in the living reality of revolution and their unshakable conviction that capitalism was 'ready' for social transformation. Guided by a military-technical conception of the revolution, 'Los Solidarios' were sometimes attacked by other anarchist groups as 'authoritarians' or 'anarcho-Bolsheviks', descriptions which should not be taken to infer the slightest tolerance towards the 'communist-syndicalists' or the Russian Revolution, both of which they regarded with abhorrence.<sup>38</sup>

'Los Solidarios' were typical of the new, unskilled working class that grew up in Barcelona during and after World War One. In 1920 all the members of 'Los Solidarios' were between 19 and 25 years of age and all were from unskilled sectors of the labour market, characterised by a near complete absence of job security and poor working conditions. García Vivancos periodically worked as a docker, a painter and a driver, while Durruti, Suberbiela and Fernández were all mechanics. Meanwhile, Gregorio Jover was a woodworker and Francisco Ascaso and García Oliver were both waiters. At one time or another, all had been victimised by employers for their enthusiastic interventions in social struggles. After one particularly bitter strike in his native Leon, Durruti was sacked by his employers and expelled by the UGT for committing acts of sabotage, doubly disciplined by management and union alike for his radicalism.

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<sup>37</sup> See Rai Ferrer, *Durruti, 1896-1936*, Barcelona, 1985, pp.48-68; Abel Paz, *Durruti, passim.*; García Oliver, *El eco, passim.*; Ricardo Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política. Los "solidarios" y "nosotros"*, Toulouse, 1966, *passim.* and *El sindicalismo español, passim.*

<sup>38</sup> Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas*, pp.45-48. Curiously, 'Los Solidarios' were also sometimes known as 'Los aristócratas' 'because we all dressed impeccably...I always liked to dress well': García Oliver, *El eco*, p.112

Formed within a despairing social milieu that offered little promise of gradual change, the militant anarchists were intensely critical of the anarcho-syndicalist wing of the CNT, whom they regarded as 'reformists'. Instead, 'Los Solidarios' believed that any freedom had to be fought for, gun in hand and that the starting-point for anarchist activity was not the theoretical consciousness-raising measures that occupied so many other *grupos* but practical action to incite the revolution. Accordingly, 'Los Solidarios' developed a strategy of *ajusticiamiento* ('bringing to justice'), that they directed at both Libres and leading political personalities associated with the repression of the proletariat. Anchored in violent group action, rather than mass trade union mobilisation, this tactic mirrored their status as unskilled workers with poor bargaining power.<sup>39</sup>

The limitations of *grupismo* were, however, starkly revealed by the 1923 coup d'état. Although the *grupistas* were courageous enough to confront employer-paid thugs, it was the struggle of an élite whose *esprit de corps* and conditions of struggle kept it relatively aloof from the bulk of the organised proletariat. Similarly, the *grupistas* were devoid of any kind of political strategy capable of attracting large numbers of workers and transcending the cycle of violence. Consequently, while *grupismo* removed a few intransigent bosses or hated politicians, it was never going to transform the existing socio-economic and political system, just as it was a wholly inappropriate form of resistance to a modern state. Indeed, the imposition of what was, on balance, a far from tyrannical dictatorship, proved a powerful enough wind to scatter the unorganised and diffuse anarchist cells.

In 1927 the anarchists gave organisational expression to the array of *grupos* throughout the Spain and Portugal by creating the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI).<sup>40</sup> Formed clandestinely, the FAI was clearly reminiscent of the Bakuninist sects of the nineteenth century and signified the resurrection of a purely anarchist secret society. Yet the FAI was not based on an exclusively nostalgic mission and one of the resolutions passed by the hundred or so libertarians at its founding conference was that

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<sup>39</sup> Paz, *Durruti*, pp.17-22, 67; Sanz, *El sindicalismo español*, pp.51-77, 95-118; *La Revista Blanca*, 1 April 1924

<sup>40</sup> José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, (2nd edition) London, 1990, p.55; Juan Gómez Casas, *Historia de la FAI*, Madrid, 1977, *passim.*; 'Juan del Pueblo Español', *FAI*, Madrid, n.d.

the new body devote itself 'to return the labour movement to anarchism'.<sup>41</sup> Predicated on a series of negatives - anti-politicism, anti-communism, anti-socialism - the aims of the FAI were essentially two-fold: firstly, it was to inject anarchist purity into the CNT and thereby guarantee the future of Iberian anarchism; secondly, in keeping with the 'anarcho-Bolshevism' of 'Los Solidarios', it was to serve as the exclusive committee of the revolution.

The FAI was determined to prevent the emergence of what it saw as 'politicism' within the CNT, the dangers of which, the anarchists believed, were eloquently revealed by the links between the UGT and the PSOE. According to the libertarians, the socialist unions had ceased to be class organisations, becoming instead 'bossified' and 'domesticated' semi-statal bodies under the control of the socialist party bureaucracy. The FAI was also to guard against any incursions of other workers' groups into the CNT, particularly the dissident communists. Their defensive brief was undoubtedly conditioned by the experiences of anarchist militants of exile in the 1920s, particularly in Paris and Brussels, where they were alarmed by the throng of fellow anarchist émigrés, ranging from Italians, displaced by the newly imposed fascist dictatorship, across to the Russians recently defeated by the Red Army. The visceral anti-communism of 'Los Solidarios' was reinforced by meetings between Durruti, Francisco Ascaso and Nestor Makhno, the renowned anti-Bolshevik, anarchist *guerrilla*. These sentiments were heightened by the fact that in France, the birthplace of anarchist theoreticians like Pierre-Jean Proudhon and Sebastian Faure and the cradle of anarcho-syndicalism, the *grupistas* witnessed firsthand the ascendancy of communists within the unions and the expansion of a mass pro-Bolshevik party.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the global trend from the Ukraine to Montevideo seemed to confirm the retreat and defeat of anarchism. It was this drift that the FAI set out to halt.

The self-proclaimed role of the FAI as custodian of the interests of the CNT was given a new impetus by developments across the Atlantic, through the writings of the Spaniard Diego Abad de Santillán and his Argentinian associate, Emilio López Arango.

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<sup>41</sup> Gómez Casas, *Historia de la FAI*, p.120

<sup>42</sup> See Edouard Dolléans, *Histoire du Mouvement Ouvrier, 1871-1936*, Paris, 1946, vol.2

Through their militancy in the Federación Obrera de la Región Argentina (FORA), López Arango and Abad de Santillán developed the concept of *trabazón*. Signifying 'bond' or 'fusion', *trabazón* guaranteed the connection between the unions and the anarchist movement through the formation of joint committees, such as prisoners' welfare groups, geared to enhance the profile of the anarchists in the unions. Thereafter, the anarchists were to work tirelessly to win the leadership of the unions.<sup>43</sup> Believing that the open nature of the French syndicalist unions had made them easy prey for 'communist infiltrators', the FORA opposed working class unity and the traditional anarcho-syndicalist view. Instead, the supporters of *trabazón* felt that the ideological diversity of the proletariat heralded a Darwinian type struggle, whereby the strongest or most intransigent faction would emerge victorious. Given the significance of this struggle and the importance of anarchist unity over proletarian unity, it was, in the words of one of the FORA's organs, 'a mistake to pledge oneself to halt the disintegration of the labour movement' and even though the supporters of the anarchists might be few, it was better to divide and split the unions and separate from their enemies, rather than sink in 'a sea of contradictions' which characterised mass syndicalism. This was precisely what happened, as *trabazón* stimulated rampant sectarianism against both revolutionary syndicalists and Bolsheviks, alienating thousands of non-anarchist workers from the FORA and precipitating a collapse in its membership in the late 1920s.<sup>44</sup>

Blinded to the disastrous ramifications of *trabazón* in Argentina by their anti-communism, the FAI seized on what it viewed as a recipe for libertarian supremacy inside the labour movement that would guarantee anarchist control over the CNT and forestall any 'communist take-over', as had occurred with the French CGT. The aims of the FAI placed it in a highly contradictory situation, both within the labour movement as a whole and within the CNT. Firstly, despite its anarchist orthodoxy, the FAI saw itself as a vanguard body in relation to the labour movement. This position was

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<sup>43</sup> Emilio López Arango and Diego Abad de Santillán, *El anarquismo en el movimiento obrero*, Buenos Aires, 1925; Ronaldo Munck, Ricardo Falcón and Bernardo Galitelli, *Argentina: From Anarchism to Peronism. Workers, Unions and Politics, 1855-1985*, London, 1987, pp.49-105

<sup>44</sup> *¡Libertad!*, 1 May 1930; *El Libertario*, September 1929

reflected in the paternal concern of the anarchists towards the CNT trade unions that it regarded almost as its errant children. Secondly, for a creed that pledged apoliticism, the drive for anarchist purity was highly 'political'. Not only was anarchism itself a 'political' doctrine but the FAI, in pursuing *trabazón*, was fulfilling a thoroughly *political* role in the unions. Lastly, out of all the factions in or around the CNT, the commitment of the FAI to the unions was almost certainly the least constructive. For while the anarcho-syndicalists and the communists both viewed the unions as indispensable instruments *en route* to the revolution, many within the FAI saw the unions as little more than a forum for revolutionary agitation and the rank-and-file syndicalists as the foot soldiers of the insurrection. Some anarchists were blatantly anti-syndical, regarding *sindicatos* as a kind of counter-revolutionary force, which sought to 'prolong the class system'. Moreover, the daily round of syndical organisation was barely concordant with the messianic attitudes of the 'revolutionary idealists' of the FAI and their manifest intolerance towards 'reformist' short-term gains and strikes designed to win what one *faísta* pilloried as 'miserable (*mezquino*) wage rises'.<sup>45</sup>

In 1930 the FAI was very distant from attaining its aim of replacing the existing union leadership. With many of its potential anarchist supporters still in exile in France, Belgium and Latin America, the FAI consisted of no more than a few dozen militants scattered around Barcelona, who were little concern to the authorities. 'Los Solidarios', the most active of all the *grupos*, had been totally disrupted by the authorities. Some of its members had been killed in gunfights with the security forces in 1924, while some were executed. Durruti, Francisco Ascaso and Jover were abroad in exile, García Oliver was in jail and Torres was in an asylum.<sup>46</sup> When the FAI showed its hand at a clandestine CNT plenum held in Madrid in 1928 its proposal for *trabazón* was rejected by a crushing anarcho-syndicalist majority. The following year the FAI publicly revealed its existence, although it continued to develop very slowly. It suffered a setback, however, in 1930 when José Elizalde, the secretary of the FAI Peninsular

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<sup>45</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 29 November 1930; Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, p.223

<sup>46</sup> Vega i Massana, *El Trentisme*, p.17. Torres's unstable personality was irrevocably disturbed by the cumulative effects of police torture. The hatred of Torres for authority was so great that he became violent at the very sight of a uniformed individual: Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, p201.

Committee, the brain of the anarchist organisation, was removed on the suspicion that he was a police informant. His replacement, Juan Manuel 'Juanel' Molina, recently returned from exile, was shocked to find out that the Barcelona organisation did not even have a typewriter to its name. Yet under 'Juanel', the FAI slowly began to raise its profile, particularly through its weekly paper, Tierra y Libertad and in June 1930 Jaume Magriñá and Manuel Sirvent became the first *faístas* to be represented on the CNT Catalan and National Committees. Nevertheless, with the notable exception of the Builders' Union, led by Ricardo Sanz, a 'Los Solidarios' veteran, all the Barcelona unions were under the hegemony of the anarcho-syndicalists. Undeterred, the FAI doggedly set about gaining influence within the Prisoners' Support Committee (Comité Pro-Presos), the CNT-organised groups that were responsible for the welfare of jailed *cenetistas* and their families.<sup>47</sup>

Though a separate organisation from the CNT, the overwhelming majority of *faístas* were, nevertheless, *cenetistas*. This was a confluence that the FAI was prone to reiterate. Equally important, was the appeal of the FAI to youth and those elements within the CNT who had been schooled in the bitter post-war struggles, which endowed it with a strong *esprit de corps*. Since adolescence many of these younger militants had known nothing but jail, police brutality and illegality, they were imbued with an unquestioning faith in libertarian communism and they rejected compromise as the harbinger of defeat.

Interestingly, for all their doctrinal differences between the 'pure' or militant anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists, there was little difference between the two factions in the spring of 1931 when it came to the coming elections. Firstly, like the anarcho-syndicalist CNT leadership, many radical anarchists felt a lingering respect for Macià following his armed plots against the dictatorship. Even the 'Los Solidarios' veteran García Oliver admitted a certain 'sympathy' towards Macià from the days of their exile in Paris in the 1920s. Similarly, his comrade in arms, Durruti, praised the 'inherent goodness' and the 'purity and integrity' of the ERC leader. Secondly, it was not

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<sup>47</sup> Berenguer, *De la Dictadura*, p.53; Gómez Casas, *Historia de la FAI*, pp.118-119; Jaume Fabre and Josep Maria Huertas, 'Juanel i Lola Iturbe, una vida d'amor i d'anarquia. D'un temps, d'una FAI', *L'Avenc*, 39, 1981, pp.16-22; Sanz, *El sindicalismo español*, p.216

uncommon for leading *faístas* like Josep Alberola, Felipe Alaíz, Magriñá and Libertad Ródenas to appear on the same platform as Esquerra and even Acció figures to protest against governmental repression. Finally, many militant libertarians fully accepted the necessity of some kind of cooperation with the Republicans and made no attempt to follow an abstentionist line in the elections. The mood of both the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists was summed up by José Vilaverde, a leading *cenetista* from Galicia, who stated that 'the ranks of the CNT are prepared to intervene directly in events [i.e. elections] which will guarantee the establishment of this new judicial order'.<sup>48</sup>

It was the remaining tendency within the CNT, the dissident communists of the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (BOC), which rallied against what they saw as the pro-Republican illusions of both the anarcho-syndicalist CNT leadership and the anarchists.

The development of communism in Catalonia and in Spain was far slower than in the neighbouring Gallic country. This retardation was inextricably linked with the twists and turns of the power struggle in the Soviet Union, during which Catalan and Spanish communists became intensely divided, both from each other and among themselves. The 'official' party, the Partido Comunista de España (PCE), which was firmly rooted in the ultra-sectarian 'Third Period' orthodoxy of the Communist International, proved highly unpopular with the Iberian labour movement. This opprobrium largely stemmed from the divisive nature of PCE syndical policy which, *via* its mis-named Comité de la Reconstrucción de la CNT, was geared towards splitting the CNT. Such a policy was despised by anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and anti-Stalinist communists alike, because it served to weaken what the most important self-defence organisation of the Iberian proletariat.<sup>49</sup> Apart from winning a power base in a number of CNT unions in Seville city, this schismatic policy brought the Stalinists nothing but scorn. Consequently, by January 1931 the PCE had no more than 50

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<sup>48</sup> García Oliver, *El Eco*, pp.85-89; Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, p.142; *La Tierra*, 2 September 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 September 1930, 19 March, 31 May 1931; Vega i Massana, *El Trentisme*, p.56; Adolfo Bueso, *Recuerdos de un cenetista*, l'Esplugues de Llobregat, 1976, vol.1, p.328; Pou and Magriñá, *Un año*, pp.92-95; Manuel Buenacasa, *La CNT, "Los Treinta" y la FAI*, Barcelona, 1933, pp.109-110

<sup>49</sup> *Acción Social Obrera*, 14, 21 June 1930; *Comunismo*, June 1931, August 1932; *La Batalla*, 12 February 1931



members in Catalonia, the most important pocket of industrialisation in the whole of Iberia. Instead, the BOC, the majority pro-Bolshevik organisation, which qualitatively and quantitatively accounted for the cream of the Iberian communist movement, was 'dissident' to the official communism of the Soviet leadership.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the best efforts of their enemies inside the CNT to portray the BOC as Marxist upstarts intent on 'seizing power' within the Confederation, the supporters of the Russian Revolution represented a long-standing tendency in the unions. Since 1917-1918 the 'communist-syndicalists' had occupied a specific space within the CNT through *Comités Sindicalistas Revolucionarias* (CSR's), the pro-Bolshevik cells by which they stressed the applicability of Russian lessons for the Iberian revolutionary movement and hoped to lead the CNT away from the quagmire of apoliticism. Enthused by what they believed was a Europe-wide shift from anarchism to revolutionary communism, the 'communist-syndicalists' warned that the organisations of the Catalan proletariat were doomed to obsolescence unless they jettisoned the traditional anarcho-syndicalist leadership and adopted a line more suitable to the complexities of post-war class struggle. However, the supporters of the CSR's were largely isolated in the CNT by their libertarian rivals who, ironically, resorted to perfunctory bureaucratic methods to trample on the very traditions of proletarian democracy they claimed to be defending. Nevertheless, the prognosis of the dissident communists was in part verified by the ignominious collapse of the CNT after the 1923 coup d'état.<sup>51</sup>

Opposition to the growing stranglehold of the anarchists over the unions in the early twenties conditioned the syndical strategy of the 'communist-syndicalists', who maintained that 'the CNT must not be an anarchist party, but a class organisation which all workers with a revolutionary spirit can form a part whatever their ideological make-

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<sup>50</sup> Manuel Tuñón de Lara, *Luchas obreras y campesinas en la Andalucía del siglo XX. Jaén (1917-1920), Sevilla (1930-1932)*, Madrid, 1978, pp.143-145, 269; Albert Balcells, *Marxismo y catalanismo, 1930-1936*, Barcelona, 1977, p.17; Andrew Durgan, *Dissident Communism in Catalonia, 1930-1936*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1988, *passim*.; Antoni Monreal, *El pensamiento político de Joaquín Maurín*, Barcelona, 1984, *passim*.; Joaquín Maurín, *El Bloque Obrero y Campesino, origen, actividad, perspectivas*, Barcelona, 1932, *passim*.

<sup>51</sup> *La Batalla*, 30 December 1922; *Lucha Social*, 19 February 1921, 24 June 1922; Andrew Durgan, 'The Catalan Federation and the International Communist Movement', *Colloque sur l'International Communiste. Centenaire Jules Humbert-Droz. Actes*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1992, pp.280-281; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 August 1923

up'. This continued into the 1930s and provided the BOC with its central axiom that only by avoiding a fixed and determinate ideological position could the unions create the broad unity of the proletariat necessary to extract concessions from the recalcitrant Catalan bourgeoisie.<sup>52</sup> Tactically this was very similar to the anarcho-syndicalist Carte d'Amiens and there were clear points of contact between the anarcho-syndicalists and the dissident communists, such as the need to bolster syndical organisation and their critique of the blind anarchist faith in spontaneity. This confluence between the 'communist-syndicalists' and the orthodox anarcho-syndicalists was largely derived from their Sorelian origins and their advocacy of 'collective revolutionary violence', a legacy that they never fully broke with.<sup>53</sup>

What made the *bloquistas* unique within the CNT, however, was their insistence on the need to struggle, like the Bolsheviks, on the political plane. The BOC felt that the *sindicatos* should work in tandem with a new revolutionary political party of the Catalan proletariat. Until the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists accepted the reality that the proletarian victory presupposes a struggle for political power, the communists mused that they would still be waiting for their libertarian communist revolution in the thirtieth century. Consequently, in the prelude to the April 1931 elections this position was repeatedly voiced by the Bloc, who reiterated that the proletariat was dangerously underrepresented on a political level due to its retarded political culture and the inheritance of years of anarcho-syndicalist apoliticism. In the view of La Batalla, 'what the proletariat wants is a doctrine, a method and a tactic that would be effective in its struggle against capitalism'.<sup>54</sup>

Although the *bloquistas* were outnumbered by the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in the unions, they still enjoyed much influence in the CNT and the bulk of its militants were seasoned *cenetistas*. With the resurrection of the CNT in 1930 the dissident communists began to reorganise their supporters as the Oposición Sindical

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<sup>52</sup> Lucha Social, 24 June, 22 July 1922. As La Batalla explained, 'under a bourgeois régime only a single "interest" and a single "end" can group all the workers: class interest and the abolition of capitalism; a common end produces a common action': La Batalla, 6 June 1930

<sup>53</sup> Eugenii Preobrazhensky, Anarquismo y comunismo, Barcelona, 1932, *passim*.; Durgan, Dissident Communism, pp.13-27; Joaquim Maurín, El sindicalismo a la luz de la Revolución Rusa (Problemas que plantea la Revolución social), Lleida, n.d.

<sup>54</sup> La Batalla, 4 July, 8 August 1930

Revolucionaria (OSR). Rooted in issues of practical trade union organisation and incessant criticism of the tactical misconceptions of the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist leadership, the OSR was very influential in reorganising the printers and shopworkers' unions in Barcelona in 1930, as well as a number of CNT unions outside Barcelona province, particularly in Lleida, the birthplace of the BOC leader Joaquim Maurín and known among the anarchists as 'Mauringrad'.<sup>55</sup>

The inveterate anti-communism of the anarchists meant that an alliance between the *bloquistas* and the *faístas* to remove the moderate anarcho-syndicalist CNT leadership was out of the question. As in the 1920s, the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists resented the influence of the communists in the CNT and both conspired to halt the advance of the *bloquistas*. In reply, the OSR tenaciously fought for a platform of union democracy and the right to form factions inside the CNT. Drawing on their unitarian faith, the dissident communists attacked the CNT leadership for wanting to monopolise the reconstruction of the Confederation, reminding them that 'the unions are not anarchist organisations, nor are they either socialist or communist: they are the organisations created by workers for their own self-defence, whose origins predate the existence of anarchists, socialists and communists'. Meanwhile, pointing to the contradictions of the anarcho-syndicalists and the anarchists public defence of a politically-neutrality labour movement and their underhand efforts to imbue it with an anarchic content, the dissident communists accused the other tendencies in the CNT of being afraid of internal freedom, a liberty that *La Batalla* sustained 'is absolutely crucial in the union organisations so that the working masses can assess, through the experience of its own action and that of others, which tendency is best placed to lead the proletariat towards victory in its struggle against capitalism'.<sup>56</sup>

The 'communist-syndicalists' were confident that if the free competition of political ideas was guaranteed in the CNT they could succeed in winning the leadership of the labour movement. This optimism was informed by their unshakable belief that in

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<sup>55</sup> Jaume Barrull i Pelegrí, *El Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Lleida, 1919-1937)*, Lleida, 1990; Porcel, *La revuelta*, p.167

<sup>56</sup> *L'Opinió*, 5 September, 2 October 1930; *Acción*, 12 July 1930; *Acción Social Obrera*, 7 July 1930; *La Batalla*, 30 May, 11 July 1930; *Treball*, 12, 19 July 1930

Europe and in Catalonia, the twin impact of the Russian Revolution and the economic expansion of World War One had tilted the balance against the libertarians, creating conditions that would erode the basis of anarchism and, like in France, lay the foundations for a mass communist movement.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, what many saw as the strong anarchist traditions among the Catalan proletariat were dismissed by the 'communist-syndicalists' as a mirage. Maurín maintained that the masses were never anarchist and that they followed the CNT not out of loyalty to the ideology of the union leadership of the day but by virtue of the combative strength of the Confederation. This belief led Maurín to assert that 'the Catalan proletariat is not anarchist' and that 'Barcelona has never been anarchist'.<sup>58</sup> Thus the *bloquistas* believed that their crossing of the Rubicon from anarchism to communism was an example that the rest of the proletariat was set to emulate.

The central project of the BOC was to forge a coherent proletarian political party that could compliment the existing syndical organisation of the working class. This task was all the more urgent because the BOC theorists reasoned that a revolutionary crisis was imminent in Spain and that the creation of an exclusively class party was, therefore, vital if the proletariat was to be liberated from capitalist oppression.<sup>59</sup>

Like the Esquerra, the BOC contested the April 1931 elections on a pro-amnesty platform. Also like the ERC, the BOC promised to renounce the huge, potentially debilitating, municipal debt that was accrued by successive corrupt administrations during the monarchy. Following the extravagant 1929 World Exhibition municipal debt assumed mammoth proportions as the dictatorial authorities had allowed municipal funds to be pillaged by well-placed industrialists, 'the thieves of the Exhibition' to the majority of *Barcelonins*. It was axiomatic that any municipal administration which reneged upon the debts would be immensely popular with the people of Barcelona. Conversely, it followed that any administration which accepted the bills of the pre-Republican era would immediately see its ability to undertake structural reform

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<sup>57</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 August 1923; *L'Opinió*, 25 August, 8 September, 29 December 1928; Jaume Miravittles, *Los obreros y la política*, Barcelona, 1932, pp.28-35

<sup>58</sup> *L'Opinió*, 7 August, 22 December 1928

<sup>59</sup> *La Batalla*, 25 July 1930

impeded, a scenario that carried the evident danger of a clash between the rulers and the ruled.

What distinguished the proletarian Bloc from the petit bourgeois Esquerra was that the dissident communists had a revolutionary social programme. The BOC proposed a 'proletarian front' and the independent political representation of the working class, alleging that the Republicans were incapable of resolving the social question. Unlike the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists, the Bloc penetrated the demagogic veil with which the ERC enshrouded itself and advanced a highly trenchant class analysis of the Esquerra and what it regarded as its inherently petit bourgeois essence. Moreover, the BOC expounded that the project of a bourgeois-democratic republic was an impossible dream, particularly during a time of economic crisis, when the bourgeoisie, both nationally and internationally, tended towards the added protection offered to its system by fascist dictatorship.<sup>60</sup>

The BOC also developed a municipal plan, not that dissimilar from the civic initiatives developed in Vienna during the inter-war years. Accordingly, the BOC manifesto pledged to redirect Council funds to the most impoverished neighbourhoods of Barcelona in a bid to regenerate the ghettos and provide affordable housing for the workers of the city. This was combined with a blue-print for infrastructural planning in the newly developed districts that had emerged in an unregulated manner in the 1920s, an ambitious plan that carried the additional advantage of widespread job creation.<sup>61</sup>

Encouraged by the coherence of their own ideas and the apparent confusion of those of their opponents, the BOC was confident that it would attract large numbers of working class votes. Indeed, not only were the majority of the *bloquistas* also *cenetistas*, and therefore exclusively proletarian, but a vote for the BOC also promised to bring the long-awaited amnesty.

Yet the plans of the BOC were thwarted by the dalliance of the CNT leadership with the petit bourgeois Esquerra. The anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists inside the CNT balked at endorsing the candidature of an exclusively workers' party like the Bloc

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<sup>60</sup> *L'Hora*, 21 January, 11 February 1931; *La Batalla*, 5, 16, 26 March 1931

<sup>61</sup> *L'Hora*, 18 March, 1, 8 April 1931

as they feared that they would be strengthening the position of their rivals within the labour movement as a whole, not to mention enhancing the position of the *bloquistas* within the CNT. However, the march of events led them to express themselves through a second (political) party, which was representative of an exogenous social class. Thus if the force of circumstances compelled the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists to break with their apolitical shibboleths and commit the heresy of voting in the 'electoral farce', the libertarians preferred the double heresy of voting for a petit bourgeois party like the Esquerra.

The tolerance of the anarcho-syndicalists and the anarchists towards the ERC during the elections was not seen by the BOC as an aberration but, rather, as evidence of the very crisis of their tactics of libertarian apoliticism. The abandonment of the political struggle was publicly recognised by Solidaridad Obrera just weeks before the fall of the monarchy, when it admitted that 'today nobody wants power'.<sup>62</sup> Seizing on potential dangers of isolating the huge economic power of the CNT from broader political issues, the communists saw the general ideological poverty of the Iberian left clearly reflected in the cardinal error of the anarchists in ignoring the dual - economic and political - oppression of the proletariat and their tendency to divorce the quest for power into two separate spheres. As La Batalla explained, 'in the struggle against capitalist society it is impossible to separate economic action from politics...there is no evolution or revolution without political intervention in the class struggle'.<sup>63</sup>

The BOC weekly also inveighed against the 'Republican degeneration' of the CNT leadership who, it believed, had become 'an appendage of the small bourgeoisie'. However, the alarm call of the *bloquistas* was muted as their newly formed party had a limited influence. This situation was exacerbated by Solidaridad Obrera, which doggedly refused to advertise BOC meetings as they were 'political', even though equally political gatherings of the petit bourgeois ERC received full coverage in the pages of the CNT daily. This was combined with a campaign of defamation against the dissident communist BOC. For instance, although Peiró advocated an alliance with all

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<sup>62</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 24 March 1931

<sup>63</sup> La Batalla, 23 May, 8 August 1930

anti-dictatorial political parties against the monarchy, he revealed his hatred for communists, alleging that they were sold to Russian gold. Such rigid and unwavering anti-communism was even more evident inside the unions, where anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists alike resorted to undemocratic procedures to marginalise the advocates of independent proletarian politics. *Bloquistas* and members of the OSR were impeded from addressing union meetings even though the leaders of the Confederation alleged that its ranks were open to all workers. Finally, in the prelude to the elections this labour of sabotage saw the CNT leadership organise joint rallies with Republicans to coincide with those of the dissident communists. This lends support to the claim of the BOC leader Maurín reflected that 'in their everyday action they [the CNT leaders] were the docile and blind instruments of the left Republicans'.<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, from their own perspectives, the stance of the anarcho-syndicalists and the anarchists made sense. A vote for the ERC held out the promise of releasing the prisoners, while also checking the advance of their dissident communist rivals in the workers' movement. It did not, however, enter into the calculations of the CNT leadership that in their determination to block the BOC they were emasculating the proletariat politically. Similarly, they also ignored the fact that they were handing the initiative to middle class politicians and bringing the danger that the proletariat might be politically integrated within the bourgeois democracy. This, however, was soon to change.

### **2.3. The New Republican Dawn**

On 14 April 1931 the Spanish monarchy collapsed and the Second Republic was proclaimed. Two days earlier nationwide municipal elections revealed that in those areas where the vote had not been rigged, an overwhelming majority of the population favoured a Republic. When the commanders of both the army and the Civil Guard informed the monarch that they lacked the resolve to defend the Crown against the popular will, the King decided to go into exile, leaving Spain and his ungrateful former

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<sup>64</sup> *La Noche*, 30 March 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 March 1931; *La Batalla*, 23 May, 15 August 1930, 2, 14 April 1931; Joaquín Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución en España*, (2nd edition) Paris, 1966, p.93; *L'Hora*, 4 March 1931

subjects behind him. After centuries of monarchical rule Spain was on the brink of a new Republican era. It also seemed that the strait-jacket that the conservative right had placed around society was on the verge of being removed.

Popular hopes of a new dawn were reinforced by the ambivalence of the military towards the departure of the monarch. Traditionally, the military had been the arbiter of Spanish politics, a pro-monarchical praetorian guard. In the nineteenth century the army intervened in the political arena to destroy the First Republic. Thereafter, the conservative officer élite of the armed forces had been largely hostile towards projects for political modernisation.<sup>65</sup> In this context, the bloodless arrival of a Republic was remarkable.

The equanimity that characterised the birth of the 'immaculate Republic' was highlighted by the peaceful nature of the political transition in the Catalan capital. Despite Barcelona's awesome reputation in bourgeois circles for anarchist violence, the company of legionnaires billeted in the city to maintain order during the elections had no reason to leave their barracks. Events on April 12 inferred a break with both the long-standing popular indifference of *Barcelonins* towards the rigged elections of the monarchy, as the urban masses took to the streets to vote in their droves for the Republic. According to Las Noticias there was 'extraordinary animation' around polling stations in the Barri xino. Elsewhere in the city, a large turn-out of voters was reported.<sup>66</sup>

The April municipal elections in Barcelona city saw the election of 38 Republican councillors, as opposed to a mere 12 monarchists. The Esquerra cruised to victory, winning 47% of the vote. This figure was five times larger than the votes polled by the Lliga and over double the figure normally polled by victorious parties among the indifferent electorate of Barcelona city. On the day of the vote Macià, the ERC leader,

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<sup>65</sup> For the role of the military see Ballbé, Orden público; Gabriel Cardona, El problema militar en España, Madrid, 1990 and Joaquim Lleixà, Cien años de militarismo en España. Funciones estatales confiadas al Ejército en la Restauración y el Franquismo, Barcelona, 1986

<sup>66</sup> José Borrás, España, 1900-1939. Las causas de la guerra civil, Madrid, 1993, p.90; Solidaridad Obrera, 12 April 1931; Las Noticias, 14 April 1931; La Vanguardia, 14 April 1931; La Veu de Catalunya, 17-19 April 1931



received a spontaneous ovation from a crowd gathered on Les Rambles. In the nearby Barri xino the ERC triumph was emphatic.<sup>67</sup>

In Madrid, the political centre of the Spanish state, news of the vote percolated through to the authorities on April 14. By lunchtime, events took a decisive turn, when General José Sanjurjo Sacanell, the Director-General of the Civil Guard, informed Niceto Alcalá Zamora, a well-known figure in Madrid Republican circles, that the King was preparing to leave the country. When Sanjurjo placed himself at the orders of the Republican Revolutionary Committee, the birth of the Republic was assured.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the incontrovertibility of their electoral triumph, the members of the Republican Revolutionary Committee were uncertain about how to take advantage of their victory and they refrained from immediately proclaiming the Republic. In stark contrast to the quietism of the hesitant Republican politicians, the people took to the streets to celebrate the imminent departure of the King and his coterie. In Madrid delirious crowds paraded through the streets, singing 'We've kicked them out!'<sup>69</sup> Yet according to one Republican, 'the general excitement was greatest in Catalonia'. In Barcelona the noise of the streets was even most intense of all and a wave of spontaneous pro-Republican demonstrations, largely made up of workers, converged on Barcelona city centre. Chants of 'Visca Macià! Mori Cambó!' resounded in the streets, underlining the mass enthusiasm for the Republican Esquerra and the opprobrium felt for the monarchist-conservative Lliga.<sup>70</sup>

By taking to the streets, the people displayed none of the reservations of the Republican politicians, revealing instead a decisive feeling that the Republic must come. As the clamour from the streets of Barcelona grew, and mindful of the consequences should they lose the initiative, the Republicans decided to act. At 1 PM, while the historic meeting between Sanjurjo and Alcalá Zamora was taking place in

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<sup>67</sup> Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.1, p.329; Alba, *Cataluña*, p.234; *Solidaridad Obrera* and *Las Noticias*, 14 April 1931

<sup>68</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, pp.78-81; Miguel Maura, *Así cayó Alfonso XIII*, Mexico, 1962, pp.165-166; Francisco Largo Caballero, *Mis recuerdos*, Mexico, 1976, p.108

<sup>69</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, p.82

<sup>70</sup> Claudi Ametllà, *Memòries polítiques (1918-1936)*, Barcelona, 1979, p.69; Francesc Madrid, *El 14 d'Abril*, Barcelona, 1977, *passim.*; Ferran Soldevila, *Història de la proclamació de la República a Catalunya*, Barcelona, 1977, *passim.*; Joan B. Culla i Clara, 'L'altra cara del 14 d'Abril', *L'Avenç*, 26, 1980, pp.56-61; Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.1, p.344

Madrid, an Esquerra delegation headed by Companys entered the Council building in Plaça de Sant Jaume and took the dramatic step of declaring the Republic in Catalonia. This historic declaration was shortly followed by the appearance of Macià on the balcony of the Generalitat Palace, directly opposite the City Hall, where he proclaimed the 'Catalan Republic within the Spanish Federal Republic' and promised 'to die' for the Catalan Republic.<sup>71</sup>

The widespread popular joy suggested that such a sacrifice was far from necessary. After over 50 years of monarchist epilogue to the abortive First Republic, the Republic had now been proclaimed, peacefully, twice in an hour in the Catalan capital.<sup>72</sup> Although the Spanish Republic was still to be proclaimed in Madrid, a mass celebration took over the streets of Barcelona. In Plaça de Sant Jaume, soon to be re-named Plaça de la República, a lone trumpeter played 'The Marseillaise'. Meanwhile, when Macià re-appeared the crowd broke into its own rendition of the anthem of the French Republic and collective euphoria gripped the multitude in the square.<sup>73</sup>

The street celebrations of April 14 drew in the popular masses in the broadest sense, characterised by the inter-mingling of the middle and working classes. As one anarchist observed, 'all the humble people of Spain launched themselves to the streets, delirious with happiness...Spain was in fiesta'.<sup>74</sup> At the foot of Les Rambles crowds of workers waved red flags and sang 'The International', mixing freely with groups carrying Republican flags singing 'The Marseillaise'. In a new spirit of liberty and fraternity bus and tram conductors refused to charge revellers as they travelled around the city celebrating the departure of the King. More significantly still, the discipline of the security forces was broken and members of the police and cavalry detachments

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<sup>71</sup> Cucurull, *Catalunya*, p.53

<sup>72</sup> The peaceful way in which the monarchy toppled is poignantly evoked by an incident following minutes before Macià before the proclamation of the Catalan Republic. Arriving at the Palau de la Generalitat Macià and his supporters were met by Joan Malaquer i Viladot, the last monarchical President of Barcelona County Council. Although Malaquer knew that his authority was at an end, his sense of honour impelled him to inform Macià that he would only leave through force. The 71-year old Macià approached Malaquer and gave him a symbolic push, asking him at the same time: 'Is that enough?', at which point the monarchist withdrew and the Republic was announced: Alba, *Cataluña*, p.236; Poblet, *Aiguader*, p.168

<sup>73</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1931

<sup>74</sup> Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, pp.197-198

joined in the street celebrations as the popular party continued into the early hours of the morning of April 15.<sup>75</sup>

The coming of the Republic in Barcelona was made easier by the welcoming attitude of the CNT. The spontaneous approval from the streets captivated many *cenetistas* and at a meeting of activists in the Builders' Union offices on Carrer Mercaders there was a strong consensus that the birth of the Republic had to be assisted. On the very day of the birth of the new régime Solidaridad Obrera expounded that it would welcome the creation of a Republic as it signified the defeat of the traditional enemies of the proletariat and because it was consistent with 'the most hallowed aspirations of freedom and justice'. Swept along by the intoxicating atmosphere of change, Solidaridad Obrera announced candidly that 'the triumph of the Republicans has demonstrated the will of the people'. The CNT leadership converted these words into deeds, declaring a general strike to ease the transition of powers to the new Republican authorities. At the same time, the Catalan Regional Federation and the Barcelona Local Federation of the CNT issued a joint manifesto warning of the danger of an anti-democratic military action and calling for an amnesty of social and political prisoners.<sup>76</sup>

The dynamics of mass mobilisation unleashed on the streets, combined with the collapse in the traditional centres of authority, allowed for the speedy release of the jailed opponents of the monarchy. Soon after the Republic was proclaimed CNT militants moved to secure the release of their comrades from the Model Jail, Barcelona's main prison, and oversee the burning of their prison records. Given the fractured structures of the old authority, it is striking that the release of prisoners was conducted in an orderly manner, lasting almost two hours, and guaranteeing that only social and political prisoners were freed. This was followed by the release of the women prisoners from the jail on Carrer d'Amàlia, in the heart of Barri xino which, in keeping with the popular mood, was achieved peacefully. Typical of the spirit of fiesta, the liberation of the prisoners was followed by yet another street celebration involving demonstrators, newly freed prisoners and members of the public. However, events in the streets had

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<sup>75</sup> Bueso, Recuerdos, vol.1, p.345; Solidaridad Obrera, 14 April 1931

<sup>76</sup> Bueso, Recuerdos, vol.1, p.337; Solidaridad Obrera, 14-15 April 1931

overwhelmed the nascent Republican authorities and although a few hours later Macià ordered the full release of all social and political prisoners, he was only giving official recognition to what was, in most of Barcelona, an established fact.<sup>77</sup>

The contribution of the CNT and its supporters to the birth of the Republic cannot be underplayed. The scale of the electoral triumph of the ERC leaves no room for doubt that large numbers of working class votes were cast in favour of the party, both in Barcelona city and throughout Catalonia. Peiró, then secretary of the Catalan CNT recognised that on April 12 the bulk of the Catalan proletariat voted for the ERC because 'the masses felt an irresistible urge to change the political decor of the state...We never told the workers to vote, but neither did we tell them to abstain'. Aiguader i Miró, the first Republican Mayor of Barcelona, recognised that the CNT was at this time 'the strongest resistance with which Catalonia has opposed Castilian domination'.<sup>78</sup>

Nor was the intervention of the Confederal masses restricted to the electoral sphere. Their role on the streets served as a point of pressure on the diffident Republican politicians. In Santa Coloma de Gramanet, on the outskirts of Barcelona, it fell to a *cenetista* to raise the Republican flag over the Council building in the absence of any willing Republicans. The action of the CNT was most decisive in its main sphere of influence in the Catalan capital. Ricardo Sanz, the anarchist president of the Barcelona Builders' Union, whose offices were the centre of activity on the day of the proclamation of the Republic, recalled that 'the men of the CNT were in the street. This was especially so in Barcelona, where they carried the initiative...The CNT was everywhere'. The CNT also imposed its own *political* preferences on the Republican transition in Barcelona. This was vividly witnessed on April 14 after an armed group of Radicals took advantage of the confusion to establish themselves in the Civil

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<sup>77</sup> Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.1, pp.330-350; de Lera, *Pestaña*, pp.263-276; *La Nau*, 15 April 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 April 1931

<sup>78</sup> Joan Peiró in *El Combate Sindicalista*, 6 September 1935; Ramón Liarte, *El camino de la libertad*, Barcelona, 1983, p.62; Aiguader i Miró, *Catalunya*, p.28. There can be really little doubt about the contribution of the CNT to the birth of the Republic. The historian Joaquim Ferrer claims that the CNT used 'all its strength' to bring the Republic: Ferrer and Piera, *Piera*, pp.132-133. This view is shared by a libertarian historian, who observed 'who did more for the Republic than us, and we weren't even Republicans?': Joan del Pi, *Interpretació llibertari del moviment obrer català*, Bourdeaux, 1946, p.29.

Governor's building in the Plaça de Palau. When word reached CNT militants in the 'Café Espanyol' on El Paral·lel, a group of *cenetistas* set off for the Plaça de Palau where, after a show of arms and the threat of force, the Radicals were 'invited to leave' and Companys was left in power as the first Civil Governor of the Republic.<sup>79</sup>

The birth of the Republic in Barcelona clearly revealed the power wielded by the CNT in the city. The ERC won the elections thanks to working class and *cenetista* votes, and the Republicans of Barcelona were driven on to proclaim the Republic by the pressure from the streets. Moreover, as seen by events in the Civil Governor's office, the mere threat of force from the CNT was sufficient to allow the ERC to replace the Radicals in power. It should also not be forgotten that the Republic was born in Barcelona under the cover of a CNT general strike.

In a bid to undercut the psychological effects of the general strike, Companys gave official recognition to what was a *fait accompli* and declared April 15 a public holiday in Catalonia. Whether a national holiday or a general strike, only essential food and transport services ran in Barcelona and official largesse allowed the citizenry to continue to enjoy free travel on the buses and trams. The fiesta that began with the birth of the Republic continued. Symbolic of a new spirit of concord, a crowd on Les Rambles applauded as members of the security forces marched behind a Republican flag.<sup>80</sup>

Yet the aspirations for change that had accumulated within the people of Barcelona during the dark years of the monarchy were also in evidence in the two days that followed the birth of the Republic. The new age of post-monarchical freedom impelled the 'common' prisoners at the Model jail to launch a protest against their continuing incarceration and their appeals for freedom prompted an unsuccessful attempt from the streets to storm the jail and release them. Elsewhere in the city, workers ransacked the offices of a number of far-right groups that had supported the recently defunct dictatorship. Meanwhile, on consecutive days the Civil Guard was

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<sup>79</sup> José Berrueto, *Por el sendero de mis recuerdos (1920-1939)*, Santa Coloma de Gramanet, 1987, p.42; Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, pp.197-199; Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.1, pp.345-348; Vega i Massana, *El trentisme*, p.64. A few days later, the Madrid central government ratified the choice of Companys as Civil Governor.

<sup>80</sup> Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.1, p.345

called upon to protect the archives of the Barcelona law courts from crowds bent on destroying records of the arbitrary sentences dealt out by the monarchical authorities. However, these incidents produced no injuries and the rejoicing was unsullied, even when members of the Brigada Policial especializada en Anarquismo y Sindicalismo, the monarchical political police, fired shots on a hostile crowd gathered outside its headquarters.<sup>81</sup>

Just as the incoming Republican authorities benefited from the CNT-inspired general strike on April 14, so two days later the leadership of the Confederation called on workers to return to work. The CNT leadership was keen to stabilise the new régime and embark on what it heralded as a 'new era'. Encouraged by the manifestly favourable stance of the Confederation towards the fledgling Republic, on April 15 Macià tried unsuccessfully to convince Pestaña, from the anarcho-syndicalist leadership of the CNT, to accept the ministerial position for public works in his first cabinet. While this was a collaborative nettle that the anarcho-syndicalists were unwilling to grasp, a Plenum of the Catalan CNT Regional Committee agreed to send Pestaña and Sanmartin, a leading activist from the Barcelona Woodworkers' Union, to liaise between the Confederal organisation and the new government.<sup>82</sup>

The first government of the nascent Catalan Republic was intended to be a cabinet of national reconstruction. This meant that while the ERC was the unquestionable victor in the April 1931 elections, the party was prepared to allow limited cabinet representation to the other more moderate Republican groupings. Despite the rebuttal of the CNT, some representatives of the labour movement were prepared to enter the cabinet. Joan Casanovas and Manuel Serra i Moret, both from the tiny USC, became ministers, the latter occupying the all-important post for Economy and Labour. Meanwhile, Salvador Vidal i Rossell from the socialist UGT entered the ministry for Public Works, the post that had been destined for Pestaña.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Cries of 'We are thieves, but we want freedom too' ('¡Somos ladrones pero queremos la libertad también!') that incited the crowds to attempt to storm the jails: *Las Noticias*, 16 April 1931; *La Nau*, 15 April 1931; *La Noche*, 15 April 1931

<sup>82</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 April 1931

<sup>83</sup> Garriga, *March*, p.337; Víctor Alba, *Els problemes del moviment obrer de Catalunya*, Barcelona, 1972, pp.63-64; Cucurull, *Catalunya*, p.58

In spite of the absence of the CNT from government, it seemed that the two main popular powers in Catalonia - the Esquerra and the CNT - were moving in the same direction. The dramatic triumph of the ERC in the April elections appeared, therefore, to herald the possibility of a full-scale modernisation of Catalan society through an alliance between the popular classes. However, as we will see, this depended on the continuing support of the CNT for the Republic.

## 2.4. The CNT and the Republic

The CNT view of the political dynamics of the Republican moment was flimsy in the extreme. We have already seen how both the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists accepted the heroic legend of Macià and effectively passed the political initiative to the Esquerra. However, in strict theoretical terms there was no reason why either the libertarians or the anarcho-syndicalists should have felt an affinity with a bourgeois Republican régime that was prepared to co-exist with the state and the capitalist economy, the two most dreaded enemies of *cenetismo*.

Yet if CNT policy towards the Republic was not one of support, nor was it one of hostility. A week after the fall of the monarchy Solidaridad Obrera summed up the mood of popular satisfaction, announcing that 'the revolution of the 14th has put Spain at the head of all the countries of Europe'. Meanwhile, the CNT National Committee declared it would be 'pacifically-disposed' towards the Republic all the while there was no return to 'dictatorial and reactionary conditions'. The Republic was regarded as 'the point of departure' for future CNT actions. Underlying this stance was an assumption, largely inspired by the smooth transition from monarchy to Republic, that 'under a regime of liberty, the bloodless revolution is still more possible, still easier than under the monarchy'. Nevertheless, however much as the CNT leaders regarded the Republic as a suitable arena within which to organise the libertarian communist society, this was a task that lay a long way ahead in the future. As one moderate anarcho-syndicalist later explained, there was 'a certain moral agreement with the left-wing political parties, especially with the ERC', that amounted to 'an understanding' (*sobreentendido*) with the

CNT, 'an armistice between two powers - the political and the syndical - to allow the Republic to overcome the its initial difficulties and consolidate itself'.<sup>84</sup>

The moderate anarcho-syndicalists were essentially pleased with developments: they already felt that their strategy of support for the Esquerra had paid dividends insofar as the jails had been emptied of all social and political prisoners after the birth of the Republic. Peiró was satisfied that the new régime would break with the anti-labour policies of past monarchical administrations and guarantee trade union freedoms which, he believed, would allow the CNT the opportunity to recapture the strength it acquired prior to the dictatorship. As for Pestaña, although he still called himself an anarchist and refused to enter the Generalitat cabinet, he had long awaited the birth of a régime that would allow the CNT to work 'in the light of day'. In the words of his biographer, the arrival of the Republic represented for Pestaña 'the conclusion (*remate*), almost fantastic, of a long effort'.<sup>85</sup>

The dominant reformism of the CNT leadership was exemplified by an editorial published in Solidaridad Obrera just four days after the birth of the Republic. Entitled 'Camino adelante' ('The Road Ahead') the article expressed the view that the social legislation of an autonomous Catalonia could 'in part, satisfy the desires of the revolutionary proletariat'.<sup>86</sup> In keeping with this stance, the CNT directed a series of demands at the new authorities, many of which were nothing more than a call for the very democratic freedoms that had already been promised by the Republicans. The CNT also demanded the renunciation of the municipal debts from the monarchist era, the guarantee of all rights to strike, the introduction of some kind of agrarian reform in the countryside, the implementation of a number of measures against unemployment and general demands that the authorities provide 'bread, work and culture'.<sup>87</sup>

The CNT was equally concerned with issues of civil liberties, justice and policing. Solidaridad Obrera advocated that the amnesty given to 'social' prisoners be

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<sup>84</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 14, 16, 21, 23 April 1931; La Nau, 27 April 1931; de Lera, Pestaña, p.267. Republicans later claimed that the Catalan CNT has agreed to collaborate with Republic in return for union recognition: Felipe Díaz Sandino, De la conspiración a la Revolución, Madrid, 1990, pp.41-43

<sup>85</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 16 April 1931; Acción, 23 August 1930; de Lera, Pestaña, pp.265-267

<sup>86</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 18 April 1931

<sup>87</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 14, 16, 28 April 1931



extended to those convicted of 'common' crimes that were inspired by poverty and unemployment. The Confederation also demanded that the 'social' files of the monarchical police be destroyed as a gesture that the new authorities were prepared to end the arbitrary practices of the past. This was augmented by new calls for the dissolution of those branches of the security forces most involved in the repression of yesteryear, particularly the paramilitary Civil Guard and the Sometent, an armed bourgeois militia used against workers during strikes. Predictably, the despised political police, that had already fired on the people on April 15 and which was widely seen to be incompatible with democratic rule, was also singled out for disbandment. Finally, the Confederation demanded the abolition of the Mossos d'Escuadra, a specifically Catalan police force whose origins lay in the battle against medieval banditry but which had played a policing role in the cities of Catalonia.<sup>88</sup>

Many of the anarcho-syndicalists feared the possible ramifications of a split between the new authorities and the Confederation. Juan López, a close ally of Peiró, warned that if the demands of the workers were left unheard by the new authorities the immense hopes invested in the Republic could easily turn into resentment. The concerns were shared by the doleful Pestaña from the very beginning of the Republic. It seems that the burning fear of Pestaña was that the new régime might be disrupted by the anarchists, a pessimistic vision that apparently left him in a highly melancholic state on the night of April 14, while the rest of Barcelona rejoiced.<sup>89</sup>

Pestaña's despondency in April 1931 was, however, largely ill-placed. The prevailing atmosphere remained one of popular optimism, marked by a significant amount of unfulfilled expectations in a régime which many believed would sweep aside the props of the old state. Moreover, the Republican intoxication of the anarcho-syndicalists was shared by many anarchists, who stressed the need for the working class to be prepared to defend the Republic in the eventuality of any attempt at monarchical restoration. El Luchador, the weekly voice of the Montseny family, the self-styled purveyors of anarchist propriety, continued to praise President Macià and displayed an

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<sup>88</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 16, 25, 29 April 1931

<sup>89</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 16, 25, 29 April 1931; de Lera, Pestaña, pp.265-267

unexpected degree of hope in the Republic. Puente, another leading theoretician of traditional anarchism, went even further, arguing in favour of 'the consolidation of what has been already conquered'.<sup>90</sup>

However, opinion inside the FAI was far from monolithic and just as some anarchists were swept along by the surge of optimism accompanying the proclamation of the Republic, others were more circumspect. This was most evidently the case with the remnants of 'Los Solidarios', who reformed in 1931 under the name 'Nosotros'. For all the admiration the members of 'Nosotros' felt for Macià, they were convinced that the Republic fell a long way short of their ultimate goals. Years later this was summed up by Ricardo Sanz, who observed that with the coming of the Republic 'nothing had changed. The capitalist régime, and therefore socio-economic inequality, existed just as before, as did all privileges'.<sup>91</sup>

The tactical perspectives of the 'anarcho-Bolsheviks' of the 'Nosotros' group were rooted in the assumption that the Spanish state was in a condition of acute internal crisis. This, 'Nosotros' maintained, was evinced by the collapse of the constitutional monarchy and the military coup d'état of 1923, the disintegration of the dictatorship in 1930 and the birth of the Republic in 1931. They therefore viewed the Republic as yet another reflection of this historic crisis. Under these circumstances, 'Nosotros' reasoned that it was the task of anarchists to hasten the destruction of the state, not stabilise the latest democratic attempt to stave off its impending disintegration. Aware that the new authorities had a tenuous grip on power, 'Nosotros' stressed that this bourgeois political order had to be transcended by the introduction of libertarian communism. According to García Oliver, this could be best attained by preventing the consolidation of the Republic through 'insurrectionary pendulum actions', mobilisations that would aid the masses to 'overcome the complex of fear they felt towards repressive state forces, the army and the police, through the systematisation of insurrectionary actions, the implementation of revolutionary gymnastics'. By the same token, these 'revolutionary gymnastics' were intended to provoke violence from the state and the right, which in

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<sup>90</sup> *El Luchador*, 1, 15 May, 12 June, 3 July 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 April 1931

<sup>91</sup> Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, p.202

turn would engender protest actions that would attract ever-larger sections of the masses, until the Republic collapsed ignominiously like its predecessors. At this point, García Oliver calculated, the masses would have grasped the superfluous nature of the state and anarchist society could be established.<sup>92</sup>

The promise of action in 'insurrectionary pendulum actions' appealed to a number of younger militants in both the CNT and the FAI who, having seen monarchy, dictatorship and Republic rapidly succeed one another in the space of a few years, believed real change to be quite easy. Similarly, many of the anarchists who had spent the years of the dictatorship either in exile or in jail, removed from the realities of clandestine organisation, also seized on this recipe for immediate revolutionary action. Most of all, however, it was the veterans of the armed *grupos*, many of whom were highly influenced by Curzio Malaparte's Technique du coup d'État, who responded to the logic of 'revolutionary gymnastics' with greatest fervour.<sup>93</sup> Often blacklisted, and accustomed to life on the margins of society, these *grupistas* faced the new Republican period and the possibility of a truce between the state and the masses with the same unease that war veterans look towards life after armistice.

If the FAI was going to prepare for combat, it needed to stock up its arsenal. To this end, 'Nosotros' advocated the creation of Confederal Defence Committees (Comités de Defensa Confederal), joint CNT-FAI para-military formations which, it was intended, would be on a permanent war-footing, ready to respond to aggression from either the employers or the state. The proposal to construct the Confederal Defence Committees was accepted at the Madrid CNT National Plenum at the end of April 1931.<sup>94</sup> The adoption of Confederal Defence Committees also provided the FAI with an organisational space within which it could gain influence and place pressure on the CNT leadership. This opened up new vistas for the on-going FAI goal of *trabazón*, particularly as the revolutionary optimism of the *faístas* and their demands for insurrectionary activism were shared by a minority of *cenetistas*, a reality that could be

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<sup>92</sup> García Oliver, El eco de los pasos, p.115

<sup>93</sup> Curzio Malaparte, Technique du coup d'État, Paris, 1931; Fidel Miró, Cataluña, los trabajadores y el problema de las nacionalidades, Mexico City, 1967, p.54

<sup>94</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 25 April 1931

expected to continue all the while the new régime remained untainted in the collective consciousness of the Barcelona proletariat.

The last of the three factions inside the CNT, the dissident communist BOC, was aghast at the continuing confusion of the political line of both the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalist leadership of the Confederation. For the *bloquistas*, the majority of whom had emerged from within the traditions of the CNT before coming under the influence of the Bolshevik model, the Republican transition had furnished new evidence that anarchism was 'fossilised, submerged in the past' and an inappropriate response to the problems facing workers in a modern capitalist society.<sup>95</sup>

Yet the results of the April 1931 elections provided an early indication that events were not following the script written by the Bloc strategists. The party recognised that because of the apoliticism of the CNT leadership the working class had immense illusions in the ERC and the new régime. Consequently, the BOC felt it necessary to wait out 'Republican fever' before advancing to the creation of a 'revolutionary democracy' based on 'worker-peasant juntas'. Displaying a level of class analysis absent among the other factions inside the CNT, the Bloc maintained that having sensed that 'the barbarians had arrived at the gates of Rome' during the latter stages of the monarchy, the bourgeoisie now sought to protect itself within the new political structures of the Republic. Devoid of the Republican illusions that characterised the CNT leadership, the *bloquistas* expected no benevolence from the new régime. As one OSR manifesto put it, 'the Republican government can never be on the side of the workers, nor can it be neutral. It is a bourgeois government and, as such, it must forcefully defend the bourgeoisie against the proletariat'.<sup>96</sup>

The new freedoms promised by the Republic and the different reactions to it, exacerbated what was a growing struggle between the three main tendencies within the CNT. As early as April 1930, the FAI attempted to cause a 'scrap' (*bronca*) in the hope that it might prevent Peiró from addressing a Barcelona CNT Local Federation meeting. By 1931 the disruptive tactics of the FAI had increased and Solidaridad Obrera

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<sup>95</sup> La Batalla, 18 July 1930

<sup>96</sup> La Batalla, 12 March, 18 April, 14 May 1931

condemned the 'violent and stormy interventions of a tiny (*ínfimo*) minority' relying on 'the violent phrase, invective and sometimes the insult, as guiding arguments'. These interventions from *faístas* had already led to the postponement of union meetings.<sup>97</sup> In the face of a deteriorating internal situation within the unions, Juan López, Peirós' able lieutenant, issued a call for the respect of minorities inside the CNT, arguing that the wide unity of workers of all political persuasions in the unions was a prelude to a protracted assault on the bastions of capitalist privilege. Indicative of this apparently non-sectarian approach, *Acción*, the weekly paper of the Peiró-Pestaña faction, was for a while a wide forum for debate, and included articles from both orthodox anarchists like Puente and dissident communists such as Jordi Arquer.<sup>98</sup>

Yet the CNT leadership was playing an increasingly duplicitous role. Firstly, the unity call of the anarcho-syndicalists was opportunistic, as it reaffirmed their position at the head of the Confederation. Secondly, for all its promises of unity, the CNT leadership impeded the activities of the dissident communists, both politically and organisationally inside the Confederation. There was a growing tendency on the part of the anarcho-syndicalists to smother the criticisms of the *faístas* by appealing for unity within the 'anarchist family', raising the spectre of the 'communist peril' to galvanise opinion behind the existing CNT leadership. This presaged an upsurge in attacks on the right of the 'communist-syndicalists' to operate within the CNT and complaints by *bloquístas* that anarchists were behaving in a 'brutal manner' at union meetings, intimidating dissident communist activists with threats of violence. Eventually, this harassment culminated in outbreaks of violence at meetings between *faístas* and OSR militants in the metal sector, part of what *La Batalla* denounced the 'odious intolerance' of the libertarians and their goal of 'the dictatorship of the anarchists in the unions'.<sup>99</sup>

As the drive against the OSR's assumed the characteristics of a sectarian witch-hunt, the dissident communists accused the illiberal libertarians of installing an ideological 'cordon sanitaire' around unions to prevent any 'heresy' against 'the sacrosanct principles of libertarian communism'. Meanwhile, considering the *de facto*

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<sup>97</sup> José Peiró, *Peiró*, p.55; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 January 1931; *La Batalla*, 4 July, 15 August 1930

<sup>98</sup> *Acción*, 21 March 1931

<sup>99</sup> *Acción Social Obrera*, 6 July 1929; *Acción*, 14 June 1930, 4 April 1931; *La Batalla*, 23, 30 May 1930

anti-communist alliance between the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists, the dissident communists began lumping their opponents together and with more than a little irreverence La Batalla recognised that 'the anarchists of all tendencies - pure, less pure and impure - have formed a united front against the communists and the revolutionary workers'. This anti-communist 'united front' was so pronounced that the OSR platform at the July 1930 Catalan CNT Regional Conference, which included proposals for the democratisation of the CNT and Solidaridad Obrera to reflect all shades of opinion within the unions, not just that of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, was rejected amid a hysterical wave of anti-communism. Meanwhile, on a grass-roots level, intent on asserting their control of the unions at all costs, the anarchists resorted to undemocratic procedures, fabricating majorities by filling union assemblies with anti-communist workers from different industries, irrespective of the cost in terms of union reorganisation and morale.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the growth in tension between the heterogeneous tendencies inside the CNT, the Confederation was still capable of unity in action. This was witnessed during the hectic events on the day of the proclamation of the Republic, when the *cenetistas* who freed the prisoners and installed Companys as Civil Governor were a mix of all three tendencies.<sup>101</sup> However, the birth of the Republic meant that the various tendencies were no longer absorbed by the struggle against a common enemy, like in the days of the dictatorship. This meant that the profound theoretical, tactical and organisational divisions inside the CNT tended towards a protracted struggle for power within the unions. Moreover, not only were the tendencies divided over the nature of the Republican moment, but each tendency had its own vision of how the CNT should approach the new political context provided by the Republic. Therefore, the outcome of the factional rivalry within the Confederation possessed an importance beyond the organisational confines of its unions.

Despite the growing internal struggle within the CNT and the malpractices of some of the *faístas*, the union remained true to its heterogeneous traditions: there was a

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<sup>100</sup> La Batalla, 6, 27 June, 4, 11 July, 15 August 1930

<sup>101</sup> Bueso, Recuerdos, vol.1, pp.343-344

significant level of grass-roots democracy and the communists remained inside the Confederation. However, the unstable *modus vivendi* within the CNT in the spring of 1931 was a lull before a storm, for unlike the past, the anarchists of the FAI, inspired by the inexorable logic of *trabazón*, were on the verge of bringing a new poison into the CNT, a miasma that would not only devour the unions but also the Republic.

## Chapter 3: 'The Republic of Order'

### 3.1. The End of the Catalan Republic

The moderate anarcho-syndicalist leadership of the CNT was a guarantee that the flirtatious relationship between the Catalan unions and the new authorities would continue. As the first Republican Civil Governor of Barcelona, Companys realised that the best attitude towards the Confederation was to allow its unions space to operate, thereby securing the position of 'valuable elements' within those within the existing CNT leadership, like Pestaña and Peiró, whose sense of 'understanding' he commended. This attitude was shared by liberal elements within the military, who saw that the moderate *cenetista* leaders were 'men of excellent moral condition, cultured and intelligent'.<sup>1</sup>

Keen to prolong the honeymoon between the ERC and the CNT, Companys recognised his debt to the *cenetistas* from April 14-15 by responding favourably to a number of CNT demands on civil liberties and policing, including the destruction of old monarchical police records and the disbandment of the Sometent. However the greatest overture to the CNT, was unquestionably the drive by Companys against the Sindicatos Libres, the arch-enemies of the Confederation from the 1920s. Libre gunmen had reacted to the fall of Primo de Rivera in 1929 with a campaign of bloodletting throughout Barcelona province. Their response to the relegalisation of the CNT in April 1930 was similarly aggressive and they bitterly resented the competition offered by the Confederation in the workplace. By the end of 1930 the jealousy of the Libres for a revitalised CNT was reflected in a series of gun attacks on *cenetistas* throughout Barcelona province. The Libre press also issued death threats against Companys and Pestaña, both of whom were informed that they would be put in the same place as Seguí! Finally, when the monarchy fell, the fury of the virulently anti-Republican and anti-*Catalaniste* Libres seemed set to overflow. According to one insider, Ramon Sales, the leader of the Libres, greeted the coming of the Republic with a personal pledge to kill Macià and Companys. In reply to suspicions that the Libres were planning a violent attack on leading Republicans, the day after the birth of the Republic Companys ordered

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<sup>1</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9 June 1931; Díaz Sandino, *De la conspiración*, p.18



the police to raid their offices, where a collection of bombs and firearms was found. The discovery of this arms cache provided the authorities with a pretext to dissolve the union and arrest its leading militants, although Sales, the *eminence gris* of the organisation, had apparently already escaped for France by this time.<sup>2</sup>

Elements from inside the CNT chose to settle their own scores with these right-wing gunmen. The memory of the comrades murdered by *libreños* in the 1920s, mixed with bitterness at the manner in which the Libres had exploited the years of the dictatorship to usurp the position of the CNT as the main organisation of the Catalan proletariat, meant that many *cenetistas* supported decisive action. However, the main protagonists in the campaign against the Libres were the *grupistas*, the very individuals whose sense of 'confederal dignity' had been affronted most by the challenge of the 'yellow' union.

The first serious clashes between *libreños* and *cenetistas* during the Republic occurred on April 15, the day the police raided the offices of the Libres in Barcelona. While it is not easy to say who initiated the skirmishes, the casualty list of three dead Libres and a further eight wounded showed that the rightists came off worse. In the Gràcia district of Barcelona and in Badalona, renowned Libre gunmen were shot dead by what the press described as 'persons unknown', although there is little doubt that the perpetrators were pro-CNT *grupistas*. Also on April 15, there was a running gun battle between rival armed gangs in the Barri xino, a skirmish that was apparently provoked by the *libreños*. Meanwhile, on April 16, again in the Barri xino, the scene of some of the most violent street battles from the 1920s, there was another clash between *libreños* and *cenetistas*, although without any fatalities. The violence did not cease, however, and days later a top Libre official was shot dead in Barcelona.<sup>3</sup>

At first Solidaridad Obrera vilified the Libres as 'legalised criminals, an army of traitors and cowards' and encouraged retribution by publishing notes informing readers

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<sup>2</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 5-6 September, 2 November 1930, 16, 25, 29 April 1931; La Nau, 15 April 1931; La Vanguardia, 16-19, 25 April 1931; Unión Obrera, 28 November 1930; Colin Winston, La clase trabajadora y la derecha en España, 1900-1936, Madrid, 1989, pp.277-278

<sup>3</sup> Las Noticias, 16, 21 April 1931; La Nau, 17 April 1931

of the names and addresses of *libreños*, as well as practical information such as whether they were likely to be armed or not. However, fearful that the clashes between *cenetistas* and *libreños* could harm the Republic the Barcelona CNT counselled caution, alerting workers that they had not just left the 'prison of the monarchy' to enter into a cycle of violence that might culminate in a new dictatorship. There were also warnings for workers to be aware of the danger of provocations from the Libres, 'whose only mission is to serve reaction and assassinate workers'. Finally, on April 22, Solidaridad Obrera carried a stern editorial condemnation of revenge attacks on the Libres. Entitled 'Es hora de terminar' ('It's Time To Stop'), the article censured armed tactics and declared the methods of the unions to be 'absolutely opposed to a return to the individual attacks, a procedure that is completely inefficient in the material order and in the moral order renders abhorrent those who resort to such tactics'.<sup>4</sup> The editorial, which was a forthright rejection of the methods of many of the *grupistas* veterans from the 1920s, could only have served to anger the radicals who were involved in the anti-Libre violence. Meanwhile, as far as the anarcho-sindicalists were concerned, the Libres were on the run, they had been officially dissolved, their power was already non-existent and they were little threat to the CNT. Most of all, the attitude of the CNT leaders was informed by their belief that the Esquerra would adequately respond to proletarian demands.

Yet the authorities still had to deliver on the generous promises contracted to the Barcelona proletariat in the prelude to the April 1931 elections and promulgate measures capable of binding the loyalty of workers to the new régime. In practical terms, this meant the Esquerra taking advantage of its crushing mandate and initiating immediate measures to alleviate the extreme socio-economic discomfort experienced by broad sectors of the Catalan proletariat. However, this quickly became an impossibility.

The Madrid Republican-Socialist coalition was angry at the way in which Macià and the Esquerra had superseded the programme of the anti-monarchist by proclaiming a

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<sup>4</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 5, 16, 22-23 April, 1, 17 May 1931

separate Catalan Republic. The day after the fall of the monarchy, a governmental delegation made up of the erudite Andalusian socialist, Fernando de los Ríos, and two Catalans, Marcel·lí Domingo and Nicolau d'Olwer, left Madrid for Barcelona in great haste, in the hope of persuading Macià to renounce the Catalan Republic. Despite his recent pledge to lay day his life for the Catalan Republic, Macià was overcome by the reasoning of the Madrid delegation. During two days of meetings between the representatives of the central state and Catalan politicians from all the major political parties, Macià was subdued and barely spoke. Finally, after very little persuasion, Macià backed down on the question of the Catalan Republic. Yet 'L'Avi' still had to come away with a compromise solution if he was to maintain his credibility after his *volte face*. The solution was provided by the wily Andalusian de los Ríos. De los Ríos had an extensive knowledge of Catalan history and he suggested that the rift between Madrid and Barcelona could be overcome if Macià and the Esquerra revived the Generalitat, the old medieval Catalan government. Apart from being flattered by hearing an Andalusian speak on Catalan history with such sensitivity, the option proposed by de los Ríos had enormous appeal for Macià, as it held out the possibility of maintaining favourable relations with Republican Madrid. Macià himself celebrated the compromise as proof of 'Republican solidarity'. Meanwhile, the solution also appeared to be an honourable retreat from the separatist declaration of April 14. Thus, on April 21 the new Generalitat was officially recognised: the ephemeral Catalan Republic had lasted a mere three days.<sup>5</sup>

Not everyone was happy with the rapid demise of the Catalan Republic. From within the Esquerra coalition the separatist maximalists placed Macià's nationalist credentials under close scrutiny. Meanwhile, the BOC press castigated Macià as a 'counter-revolutionary' who had 'sold the freedom of Catalonia to the politicians of Madrid' by allowing an independent Catalonia to pass back under the Spanish yoke.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cucurull, *Catalunya*, pp.58-59; Alba, *Cataluña*, p.239

<sup>6</sup> *L'Opinió*, 13 June 1931; *La Batalla*, 16 July 1931, 14 January 1932; Jaume Miravittles, *Ha traït Macià?*, Barcelona, 1932, *passim*.

The ERC still controlled the Civil Governorship of Barcelona, where Companys had been placed by the power of the CNT on April 14. Although 'unconstitutional', in the opinion of the Madrid government, the central authorities were prepared to allow Companys to remain in office as 'the first Civil Governor of the people', a testament to the 'popular will'. At first sight it seemed that Companys could compensate for the Esquerra's lack of institutional power. For instance, as Civil Governor Companys enjoyed day-to-day responsibility for policing and jurisdiction over labour affairs. These were two crucial areas through which the attitudes of the working class and the CNT towards the new régime could be influenced. Equally, to many *Barcelonins* the figure of Companys was a guarantee that radical change would be forthcoming. However, in a bizarre disavowal of political power, Companys resigned as Civil Governor in June, in order to organise the ERC faction in the Madrid Cortes. In doing so, the Esquerra renounced a crucial position of authority in the city and allowed responsibility for appointing a new Civil Governor to pass to the Interior Ministry in Madrid.<sup>7</sup>

Macià's capitulation to Madrid in April and Companys' resignation in June had a terrific impact on the likelihood of success for the populist-Republican project and, ultimately, the standing of the Republic in Catalonia. The decision by the ERC to let Madrid determine the dimensions of Catalan autonomy within the Spanish parliament denied the Generalitat any real power until some unspecified point in the future when an Autonomy Statute had been ratified by both the Catalan people and the Republican parliament (Cortes). While this schema may have been in harmony with the initial Republican programme, the absence of specifically Catalan institutional mechanisms capable of solidifying a relationship with the masses who had voted for the Esquerra in the April elections was a severe impediment to overall aspirations for change, particularly as the elections of April 1931 indicated that some kind of federalist solution was the most fitting political settlement. As it was, the shift in power away from Catalonia towards Madrid was a retreat from the spirit of democracy, not least because

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<sup>7</sup> *El Matí*, 6-7 June 1931; *Las Noticias*, 14 June 1931

the political forces then hegemonic in the Spanish capital had very little support in Catalonia. For example, while the PSOE was well represented in the central government and also participated in the Generalitat coalition, the socialists were a highly unpopular grouping in Catalonia, sometimes attracting audiences as low as 16 at their public meetings. Meanwhile, at a time when *Catalaniste* sentiments were flourishing, the notoriously anti-Catalan Madrid-based PSOE endorsed campaigns in Barcelona with a marked *españolista*, even rightist flavour.<sup>8</sup>

The enhancement of the power of the Madrid Republicans, who were far more conservative than the pseudo-Jacobin Esquerra, was a further brake on the pace of reform. The speed with which the Madrid Republican-Socialist coalition had responded to the Catalan Republic reflected their circumspect desire for a formula that would not allow the military, the traditional guarantor of national unity, to associate the coming of the Republic with the secession of Catalonia. This concern was entirely consistent with the vacillating nature of the Republicans, whose failure to take advantage of the immediate collapse of Primo in 1929 resulted in the continuation of dictatorial rule until the April 1931 elections and provided a respite for the traditional economic oligarchy from swift political transformation.<sup>9</sup> It also increased the control of conservative forces, particularly the army, over the process of political transition. While the flight of Cambó on the day of the proclamation of the Republic revealed the depth of alarm within the monied classes at the fall of the monarchy, the change in régime was ultimately a defeat for the Crown and not the privileged classes, whose socio-economic power remained intact. Thus, the bourgeoisie undertook a tactical retreat under the protective cover of the military. Certainly, as we have seen, even after the Republican electoral victory, the Madrid Republicans did not take an independent lead and it was General Sanjurjo as head of the Civil Guard who finally guaranteed the Republic. While these behind-the-scenes manoeuvres were largely obscured by the triumphant irruption of the masses onto

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<sup>8</sup> *La Batalla*, 17 December 1931; Balcells, *Marxismo*, pp.26-40. In January 1932 Manuel Cordero, an Andalusian socialist, addressed a meeting of *españolista* University students opposed to tuition in Catalan: *La Batalla*, 14 January 1932.

<sup>9</sup> Maurín, *Los hombres*, pp.228-230

the streets in April 1931, as one *cenetista* observed, it was 'the indiscipline of the army', not the Socialists and the Republicans or the masses in the streets, which converted Berenguer and Sanjurjo into the 'true midwives of the Republic'.<sup>10</sup>

While the physiognomy of political power in Madrid was far less populist than in Catalonia, the Republican-Socialist coalition had, nevertheless, aroused mass expectations with their historic programme for equality before the law, the end of the death penalty, the right of association and an end to corruption. The Republicans had also made a series of highly public manifesto promises. For instance, the 1930 manifesto of the Republican-Socialist provisional government pledged that the Republic would usher in 'the Spain of the future...a new Law, anointed by aspirations of economic equality and of social justice'. Additionally, the Republican-Socialist coalition promised to repeal unfavourable labour contracts introduced during the dictatorship and talked of widespread confiscation of rural property, as well as the nationalisation of banks. These commitments were publicly endorsed by Niceto Alcalá Zamora, Lerroux, de los Ríos, d'Olivera, Manuel Azaña, Indalecio Prieto, Miguel Maura, Francisco Largo Caballero and Diego Martínez Barrio, all of whom went on to occupy cabinet positions.<sup>11</sup>

Like the Esquerra, the Madrid Republicans hoped to balance between the warring classes of Spanish society, end the blatant favouritism of the authorities towards the economic oligarchy and attend to the most pressing needs of the lower classes. The Republicans believed that the failure of the monarchical state to be even-handed and its dominant police role over civil society were the greatest causes for its loss of prestige of among the poor. This reliance of the monarchical state on relations of force for its survival, once seen as its greatest strength, mutated into its most glaring weakness after World War One and cast society into the unmediated struggle for naked class interest, simultaneously endangering the long-term survival of the state. For the Republicans, all of whom had lived through the violent struggles of the 1920s, it was of paramount importance to end the historic battle between civil society and the state by democratising

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<sup>10</sup> Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, pp.198-199; Borrás, *España*, pp.91-93

<sup>11</sup> Maura, *Así cayó*, p.98; Borrás, *España*, p.78

the state, endowing it with a rational authority and re-negotiating its legitimacy among the masses. This meant that the old partiality of the state could no longer be seen to exist and that all conflicts within civil society were to be judged by the Republican state without prejudice, in accordance with established legal practices, irrespective of the class interests involved. The Republicans hoped, therefore, that for the first time in Spain a formally liberal political and constitutional doctrine would keep the propertied classes in check through the application of the full weight of the 'rule of law'.

Republican judicial perspectives were dominated by this central problem of state legitimacy and the need to introduce the system of checks and balances of a legally functioning modern democracy in order to narrow the historic gulf between the Spanish state and the people.<sup>12</sup> The concern to end the negative perception of authority was reflected in both the ERC electoral programme and Articles 28 and 29 of the Republican Constitution, which made a formal commitment to wide-ranging legal freedoms, including trial by jury. This project was embodied in the watchword of La Calle, a Barcelona Republican paper: 'Republic, law, justice'. Finally, the Republicans hoped that once civil society was subject to the due processes of law, a new consensus would generate the stable political conditions for a programme of structural reform that would allow the neutral Republican state to administer justice to all. Accordingly, the Republic would sire a democratic legislature and legal apparatus to make peaceful change a reality, invalidating revolution and inducing the harmonious co-existence between social classes for the ultimate benefit of all. This was famously recognised in Article 1 of the Republican Constitution, and its claim that 'Spain is a democratic Republic of workers from all classes'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a general discussion of this question see Roberto Bergalli, Estado democrático y cuestión judicial, Buenos Aires, 1984, *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> L'Opinió, 13 March, 25 September 1931; La Calle, 11 February 1931

### 3.2. The Bourgeoisie and the Republic

The Madrid monarchist right and business sectors reacted with alarm at the coming of a régime that they feared, and some perhaps hoped, would end in chaos. Traumatized by the disappearance of the symbol of unyielding authority which the Crown represented, the bourgeoisie responded by exporting capital and closing factories, proof of which was evinced by the fall in business on the stock exchange and the huge withdrawal of savings from current accounts in first 5 months of Republic. Meanwhile, with immense hypocrisy, the Lliga absurdly blamed the economic crisis on the political transition to the Republic. International financial institutions were also wary of the new régime and the US Morgan bank refused to underwrite a \$60 million loan to the Banco de España.<sup>14</sup>

The traditional economic élites were placed in a dilemma by the coming of the Republic: they were suspicious of the new rulers but yet they had to deal with them. This produced a janus-faced response from the propertied classes and despite their obvious hostility, the most important Catalan employers' associations pledged their cooperation to the nascent régime. The Fomento del Trabajo Nacional explained that it was apolitical, 'always pro-government, on the side of order'. Bourgeois pressure groups quickly made their agendas known to the new Republican authorities. In keeping with its continual craving for order, the bourgeoisie hoped that the Republic would provide what the monarchy could no longer deliver: a stable political consensus based on the respect for private property and the rule of law. However, bourgeois opinion was evidently concerned that by breaking with the patterns of socio-political exclusion of previous régimes, the Republic might leave the economic élites vulnerable to attack by the masses. With this in mind, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional reminded the new authorities that

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<sup>14</sup> ABC, 2 May 1931; Generalitat de Catalunya, Butlletí Mensual d'Estadística, April 1935; Comercio y Navegación, March 1932; Joan Ventosa i Calvell, La situación política y los problemas económicos de España, Barcelona, 1932, pp.19-22; Various, La Segunda República: una esperanza frustrada, Valencia, 1987, p.19. Taking 1925 as the base year (100), trading on the Barcelona Stock Exchange fell radically from the birth of the Republic: 1930 = 151.7, 1931 = 111.3, 1932 = 83.2, 1933 = 72.2, 1934 = 86.3: Generalitat de Catalunya, Butlletí Mensual d'Estadística, April 1935, p.42.



they must act on the 'social problem', as well as enforcing the necessary respect for private property, 'the most basic guarantee of a well organised civilisation'.<sup>15</sup>

In an attempt to curb the reformist thrust of the new authorities, the demand for 'legality and order', the traditional cry of the Catalan bourgeoisie, became the leitmotif of the bourgeoisie from the very beginning of the Republic. For instance, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional warned that if the new democratic liberties were left unguarded they might culminate in 'anarchy and freedom'. Therefore, employers demanded that the Republican authorities strengthen what they called the 'principle of authority', eschewing any 'absurd tolerance' that would make the new régime 'the protector of all excesses...synonymous with disorder and licence'. Similar tones were employed by La Vanguardia, which took the civil insecurity of the bourgeoisie to the level of neurosis, warning of 'civil intolerance' and 'irreverence' which, it implied, without the same 'inflexible toughness' and 'the old implacable severity', might return society to a state of primitive barbarism.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.3. Power in the Republic

According to Eduardo de Guzmán, an anarchist journalist who experienced the Republican transition, the dilemma facing Spain in 1931 was whether 'to make the revolution or to legalise it'. To be sure, the Provisional Government could have proceeded in two ways: either legislate by decree, forcing the pace of change and then later gaining ratification from a future Cortes or, await the convocation of a Republican parliament and the approval of a new Constitution before legally initiating the reform process. The Republicans opted for the latter, more gradualist path. Accordingly, new parliamentary elections were called for the end of June, thereby bringing further respite to the economic oligarchies. Coming just two months after the birth of the Republic, the

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<sup>15</sup> Comercio y Navegación, April, May 1931; El Trabajo Nacional, April, June 1931; La Veu de Catalunya, 18 April 1931; Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, Memoria de la Junta Directiva Correspondiente al Ejercicio de 1931, Barcelona, 1932, pp.135-136, 140, 201-202

<sup>16</sup> Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, Memoria...de 1931, pp.135-136, 140, 201-202; La Vanguardia, 9-10 April 1932

results from the June elections confirmed the April vote with another crushing Republican triumph. In Catalonia the Esquerra returned 36 deputies to the 2 of the Lliga, the main party of Catalan big business. Overall, the Republican-Socialist bloc returned over 400 deputies to the Madrid Cortes, alongside the 51 parliamentarians of the right.<sup>17</sup>

It quickly became apparent that the Republican-Socialist Revolutionary Committee, now converted into the government of the Second Republic, wished to preside over a very slow rate of change. The new authorities were obsessed with legality and had the upmost concern to guarantee the peaceful transferral of powers. The pressure of big business had an undeniable impact on government thinking and the Republicans accepted the baggage of the law-and-order lobby. In fact, many Republicans believed that because the new régime was creating representative institutions which allowed for the peaceful resolution of social conflicts, any attack on the Republic was illegal. Such thinking was most certainly a reflection of the multitude of lawyers in the first Republican government.<sup>18</sup>

The Republican government promulgated an array of decrees designed to channel the revolution and defuse potential conflicts. These ranged from providing legal recognition for that which was already a *fait accompli*, such as the amnesty of socio-political prisoners, to legislating on long-standing historical struggles, such as the agrarian and Catalan questions. This was central to the project of legalising the Republican transition, leaving existing socio-economic structures and privileges intact and forestalling any danger of revolution in the street.<sup>19</sup>

Alcalá Zamora, the first President of the Republic, embodied the moderate nature of the new régime. One-time political secretary to the Count of Romanones, Alcalá Zamora had been Minister of War in the last government of the constitutional monarchy, a post from which he was forced to resign due to the failure of Spanish colonial

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<sup>17</sup> Eduardo de Guzmán, *La Segunda República fue así*, Barcelona, 1977, pp.53-71; Borrás, *España*, p.95; Javier Tusell, *Las Constituyentes del 1931: unas elecciones de transición*, Madrid, 1982, p.128

<sup>18</sup> Santos Juliá Díaz, 'De revolución popular a revolución obrera', *Historia Social*, 1, 1988, p.34. Of the first Republican cabinet Alcalá Zamora, Alvaro de Albornoz, Azaña, Maura and Santiago Casares Quiroga were all from legal backgrounds

<sup>19</sup> Borrás, *España*, p.91; Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, p.263; de Guzmán, *La Segunda República*, p.53

adventures in Morocco. As well as serving the monarchy, Alcalá Zamora also embodied many of the values of traditional Spain: he came from a southern landowning family and was a fervent Catholic who attended mass on a daily basis. Having announced his Republican 'conversion' a year before entering the Provisional Republican Government, this erstwhile monarchist brought something of the old state to the new régime and he regarded his presidency as 'a duty imposed by his conscience as a Spaniard and as a Catholic'. For his detractors, the presence of Alcalá Zamora in government evoked comparisons with the French Republican Adolphe Thiers, the 'butcher of the Commune', whose famous aphorism that 'the Republic will be conservative, or it will not be' might have been coined by Alcalá Zamora.<sup>20</sup>

There were many other monarchist 'converts' to the Republican cause. The climate of the day was summed up by another neophyte, Ángel Ossorio y Gallardo, who announced that even his cat had become Republican. These ex-monarchists openly admitted that they backed the Republic so to forestall the social revolution.<sup>21</sup> This counter-revolutionary project represented the guiding fixation of another 'convert', Maura, the Republican Interior Minister, whose father was notorious as the architect of the repression after the 1909 Setmana Tràgica. According to one hostile critic, Maura was 'of limited intelligence, unpredictable, superficial, the prototype of what is known in Madrid as a "flashy rich kid" (*señorito chulo*)'. A close associate of Alcalá Zamora, just a year before the departure of the King, Maura had publicly delivered a strong speech in defence of the monarch. However, alarmed at what he saw as the 'pre-revolutionary ambience' and the 'popular rage' against the monarchy and fully aware of the 'dangerous alternative' presented by the revolutionary left, Maura switched to the Republican camp. As he explained years later, 'our problem [i.e. in 1930-1931] was as follows: the monarchy had committed suicide, and so we had to join the nascent revolution to defend

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<sup>20</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, pp.17-18, 40, 47, 119

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Ealham, 'In Search of the Republic', *The Historical Journal*, 38, 1, 1995, pp.216-217; Borrás, *España, 1900-1939*, p.94. In the opinion of Andreu Nin, Alcalá Zamora, and those of his ilk, abandoned the monarchy 'like rats leaving a sinking ship', before the boat when down with their privileges on board: Nin, *Los problemas*, pp.53-56

within it legitimate conservative principles'. In doing so, Maura was determined to halt the revolution and control the path of the Republic, a task for which he considered himself more than suitable. He had already sought to curtail the celebrations that accompanied the proclamation of the Republic, ordering the army to move on the Plaça de Sant Jaume when he found out that *cenetistas* had entered the Barcelona Civil Governor's building. Tired of the popular revelling, he told journalists on April 16 that if he had his way the authorities would not allow 'the din (*bullicio*) in the streets to continue for an hour longer. The people are taking too much pleasure! Everything has degenerated into an unacceptable plebeian row (*escándalo populachero*)!'<sup>22</sup>

The first Republican government contained a number of ministers whose presence served as a guarantee that the pace of reform would not seriously compromise bourgeois interests. Maura, apart from his hard man image and his readiness to confront 'unruly elements' in the labour movement, was linked to the world of business through his wife, the daughter of the Count of Calatrava, the ex-manager of the Banco de Castilla. Other members of the Cabinet were also tied to business interests. Lerroux, the former Republican firebrand and Foreign Affairs Minister, had accrued considerable financial interests, while d'Olwer, the Minister for the Economy, was highly respected by sections of the Catalan bourgeoisie. All of these actors were undoubtedly interested in fashioning a conservative, almost reactionary Republic.

Even the most radical of the Madrid Republicans, like Azaña, the 'revelation of the Republic', though supportive of a thorough modernisation of Spanish socio-political life, did not place emphasis on socio-economic justice. Similarly, the reformist socialists in the cabinet, Prieto, de los Ríos and Largo Caballero, were hardly likely to drive terror in the hearts of industrialists, particularly as the PSOE triumvirate viewed the Republic as part of a wider bourgeois revolution which had to run its course before the advent of socialism at an unspecified time in the future. Moreover, Prieto, the Finance Minister, had important contacts with Basque finance capital, while Largo Caballero, the veteran

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<sup>22</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, pp.87-88; Maura, *Así cayó*, pp.48, 182-183

UGT bureaucrat, had for years defined himself by his opposition to CNT radicalism and had recently proven his opportunism by collaborating in the bureaucratic machinery of the dictatorship. Meanwhile, de los Ríos, the PSOE Justice Minister, was a humanist Fabian. The loyalty of the PSOE ministers to the Republic was unquestionable and even though they knew that bourgeois Republic could not liberate the working class, they were convinced it could introduce important social gains, just as they were prepared to doggedly defend the new régime from premature attempts at revolution. If this reformist panorama was not enough to assuage the fears of the propertied sectors, the socialists also accepted that their historic role required them to be constrained by the Republicans and make a number of concessions to the right.<sup>23</sup>

Trapped within their gradualistic ideology, the cautious Republican government shied away from promulgating radical measures to modernise the outmoded structures of Spanish society. The army, an immense burden on state spending because of its disproportionately large Officer Corps, was in desperate need of reform to bring it into line with Spain's diminished overseas interests. Moreover, a sharp cut in state expenditure on the military could have seen money re-directed to the most needy sectors of society. However, fears of the extreme right and anti-Republican officers meant that Azaña's 1931 *Ley de retiros* was relatively mild. Indeed, not only did the *Ley de retiros* merely invite generals to retire but, in an attempt to prevent rancour, the reform provided retiring officers with a salary and other privileges, including free train travel. Not surprisingly, the *Ley de retiros* has been described by one commentator as an 'expensive way' of reducing the size of the army, the cost of which ran into tens of millions of pesetas.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *El Socialista*, 20 and 23 April 1931; Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, pp.88, 107; *La Batalla*, 5 March 1931; Nin, *Los problemas*, p.56; Félix Gordon Ordás, *Mi política en España*, Mexico, 1961, vol.1, pp.258, 286; Paul Heywood, *Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain, 1879-1936*, Cambridge, 1990, pp.110-145; Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War. Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic*, London, 1978, pp.51-91

<sup>24</sup> *La Batalla*, 14 May 1931; Paul Preston, *Franco*, London, 1993, p.75. A full discussion of the Azaña reforms can be found in Michael Alpert, *La reforma militar de Azaña (1931-1933)*, Madrid 1982 and Preston, *Franco*, pp.73-76

The budgetary weaknesses of the Azaña laws were compounded by their inability to address the praetorian nature of the Spanish army, for although the military had given its assent to the new régime, the question was, how long would this remain so? As shown by the 1923 coup d'état, the Spanish military was a classic *pronunciamiento* army: it was a thoroughly unconstitutional force that had risen against every reformist government that had come to power in Spain during the previous one hundred years and it excelled only at internal actions, as an auxiliary to the security forces when the state was under threat from the people. Moreover, under the terms of the *Ley de retiros* not only did the most reactionary officers remain at their posts, but their more talented colleagues, including many Republicans, left the military in search of a profession away from the asphyxiating rigidity of service life. Worse still for the Republicans, those monarchists who chose to stand down from the army used the generous sum they received from official coffers to plot against democracy.<sup>25</sup>

The Republican-Socialist government response to the equally pressing issue of agrarian reform was also marred by the all-pervasive timid legalism of the Republicans. This long overdue measure was vital to the modernisation of the country and, just like in the case of the military, it was essential to curb the power of the *latifundistas*, the large landowners who were a bulwark of the old monarchy and whose opposition to democracy was legend. However, the agrarian reform bill was not made law until September 1932, a year-and-a-half into the Republic and, even then, it was another example of a false compromise by the Republicans, offering enormous indemnifications to the landowner class. Moreover, because of the long-standing tax fraud of landowners who lied about the true size and value of their property during the years of the monarchy, many large estates were not actually liable to be divided among the land-

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<sup>25</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, pp.22-24, 154, 165; Lleixà, *Cien años, passim.*; Ballbé, *Orden público, passim.*; Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge. Fascism and the Military in Twentieth Century Spain*, London, 1990, pp.3-29

hungry rural poor. Lastly, the agrarian reform ignored the power of the landowners to boycott the measure.<sup>26</sup>

From the point of view of the landless labourers, the agrarian law was also unsatisfactory. The painfully gradualistic agrarian reform offered no swift solution to the centuries-old yearning of the rural populace for land, just as it did nothing to alter property relations in the countryside. Instead, the reform bill was a carrot to pacify the peasantry and forestall any significant mobilisations on the land. Maurín, the BOC leader, saw the law as little more than a 'legal dyke' against revolution. A typical product of Republican jurists, Gabriel Jackson reflected that 'one would have thought that the law was written for an association of unemployed lawyers who wished to assure not only theirs own, but their sons' futures, rather than a law written for the peasants of Spain'. Another critic, Eduardo Barriobero, himself a lawyer, described the law as a piece of 'nonsense worthy of the enlightened despots of the eighteenth century'.<sup>27</sup>

This same gradualism meant that no rapid measures were taken to assist the unemployed. At the end of 1931 the first Republican budget revealed that Prieto, the socialist Minister for the Economy, was a highly orthodox minister. In order to receive foreign credits, Prieto pledged the Republic to honour all the debts of previous régimes, including the loans owing from the monarchist military adventures in Morocco and the public works programmes of the dictatorship. To do otherwise, and refuse to recognise the immense accumulated debts of previous monarchist administrations, would have meant the confiscation of bank capital, a measure that would only infuriate the bourgeoisie. This was, in Prieto's terms, a 'double-edged sword' (*arma de dos filos*) which he had no intention of wielding, as it would deny the Republic the aid of the financial classes. Ironically, and irrespective of Prieto's efforts to balance the budget, the

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<sup>26</sup> Kaminski, *Los de Barcelona*, pp.165-166. For a full survey of the agrarian reform see Edward Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution*, New Haven, 1970

<sup>27</sup> Maurín, *Revolucion y contrarrevolución*, p.57; Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931-1939*, New Jersey, 1965, p.94; Barriobero cited in Peirats, *Anarchists*, pp.76-77

commitment of the government to subsidise retired army officers and indemnify landowners ensured that the public debt actually grew during the Republic.<sup>28</sup>

While Prieto deftly handling journalists in his witty manner, he did little to endear himself to the unemployed: he failed to develop any kind of anti-unemployment plan, he introduced no systematic unemployment relief nor even a programme for new public works initiatives. As Albert Balcells noted, the Madrid Republican government was 'obsessed with budgetary balance [and], did not want to take on the burden of social insurance'. Consequently, by February 1933, nearly two full years after the birth of the Republic, a mere 2.4% of the unemployed received any kind of state benefit, and even then, the subsidy expired after a fixed period. Equally, the democratic government failed to formulate a plan to make monied sectors accept responsibility for the unemployed, not even in those cases where there was evidence that capitalists had enriched themselves from the public purse. Moreover, to the added chagrin of the left, the Republican-Socialist government remained impassive as capitalists and financiers, including the notorious 'bandits of the Exhibition', made their way across the border with the small fortunes they had accumulated in the 1920s.<sup>29</sup>

### **3.4. The 'Principle of Authority' and the 'Republic of Order'**

The revolution of Republican reason over monarchist irrationality appeared to be a coherent political project but the Republican juridico-economic settlement carried a series of contradictions at its very centre. Firstly, contrary to the belief of many Republicans, the state was not a neutral organ, just as it was not independent of social classes. While the birth of the Republic represented the shift of the economically dominant bloc away from the reins of political power, the propertied classes still represented a huge economic power that held an enduring influence over the state that was far more real than the intellectual control which the Republicans hoped to exert.

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<sup>28</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, Apuntes, pp.152-158; La Batalla, 22 December 1932; Cabrera, La patronal, p.137

<sup>29</sup> Balcells, Crisis, pp.126-127; Solidaridad Obrera, 18 April 1931



Secondly, the Republicans were unaware that the continuation of an economic system based on private property would convert the new authorities into its guarantors, the representatives of a state power that enforced the separation of the proletariat from the privileges of the possessing classes. Thirdly, despite the political unreliability of the economic élites and their traditional hostility towards democracy, the Republicans set out to gain the acceptance of the bourgeoisie for its project for socio-political modernisation. The gradualism of the Republicans towards those who had built fortifications against change since the middle of the last century, seemed out of step with the historical record which implied that any attempt at modernisation required a sharp confrontation with the forces of reaction.

In practical terms, the Republican authorities were ineluctably drawn towards a *quid pro quo* to appease the bourgeoisie within the new political order. This entailed responding to the ever-present security fears of the bourgeoisie, a process that culminated in the so-called 'Republic of Order'. Far from a rhetorical overture towards conservative sectors, the 'Republic of Order' was a firm reality, as demonstrated by a rise in expenditure on law-and-order in the first two years of the new régime, the bulk of which was used to strengthen the police.<sup>30</sup> Given that the authorities showed little largesse towards the unemployed, the spending on law-and-order indicates one of the major priorities of the first Republican government, whose members must have been aware that by leaving the open wound of unemployment on the body of the proletariat, the prospect of social conflict was very strong. To be sure, as a leading Spanish sociologist has observed, it is axiomatic that 'the greater the fear and insecurity, the more need there will be for judges, Civil Guards and police'.<sup>31</sup>

The attitude of the Republicans towards law-and-order and civil rights was consistent with their highly equivocal attitude towards reform. From the birth of the new régime the right to association was never fully extended to anarchists and communists and although closed meetings were initially tolerated, this was conditional on the

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<sup>30</sup> Balcells, *Crisis*, pp.132-133

<sup>31</sup> Trinidad Fernández, 'La configuració històrica del subjecte delinqüent', p.71

goodwill of the authorities. In a clear case of discrimination, the Republicans betrayed their promises by repeatedly circumscribing the rallies by the revolutionary left. Equally, the Constitution drafted under a committee presided over by Luis Jiménez de Asúa, a leading PSOE jurist, carried a clause that allowed for the suspension of civil rights. Illustrative of the conservative drift of the Republican frame of mind, the restrictions on civil liberties were endorsed by an overwhelming majority in the Cortes. Even on a clear-cut issue like the repeal of the death penalty, a measure that had been an ever-present Republican manifesto pledge since the nineteenth century, the new government arrived at a meek compromise and although capital punishment was abrogated in 1932, the authorities continued to pay the salaries of all the provincial executioners in Spain 'just in case'.<sup>32</sup>

A similar retreat occurred with the Civil Guard. Before coming to power the Republicans had developed the image of their ideal state as a rational authority. Consequently, they had promised to move away from the traditional reliance on the hated Civil Guard, particularly as many workers' groups made it clear that the disbandment of the force would be interpreted as a sign of good intent on the part of the new authorities. However, once in power the survival of this traditionally anti-democratic and highly élitist body was not viewed by Republican politicians as a serious threat to the wider goal of enhancing the legitimacy of the state and it was accepted that the Civil Guard could serve as a useful prop for the new institutions. Julián Besteiro, a leading PSOE ideologue, looked on the Civil Guard as 'an admirable machine [which] should not be suppressed but made to work in our favour'. This coincided with the opinion of Maura who, as Interior Minister, welcomed 'authority' and 'discipline' and described himself as a 'fervent supporter' of the Civil Guard. Maura 'categorically refused' to dissolve the force, nor reform it 'in such a way that it would give the impression that it had been dissolved', nor change 'even a comma of its famous order'. Not only did the military structure and leadership of the Civil Guard remain unchanged,

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<sup>32</sup> Ballbé, *Orden público*, pp.318, 337, n.35; Eslava, *Verdugos*, p.308

but Maura also rejected suggestions that the force change its image by altering its unique three-cornered hat, the graphic symbol of repression in much of Spain. When more radically inclined cabinet members opposed the attitude of Maura he responded by offering his resignation, whereupon he was assuaged by being given full control of law-and-order.<sup>33</sup>

Maura, nevertheless, accepted the need to re-deploy the Civil Guard. Along with Ángel Galarza, the socialist Chief of Security, Maura believed that the force was no longer suited to deal with the potential threats to public order posed by Spain's increasingly complex urban centres, particularly the protest movements inspired by a modern labour movement. Both Maura and Galarza were alarmed that the traditional reliance of the Civil Guard on the Mauser rifle produced large numbers of casualties and generated a level of violence that was likely to broaden protest rather than curb it. Consequently, the Republican authorities resolved to deploy the bulk of the Civil Guard in the countryside, utilising them as an auxiliary force in urban centres only when public order was placed under severe strain. Barcelona was viewed as a special case by the authorities, however, and the Catalan capital was to have Civil Guard stations and barracks within its municipal boundaries.

In a bid to fill the partial vacuum left by the Civil Guard in the cities the government created the *Guardias de asalto*. The *Asaltos* were conceived as a new Republican police force which would assume responsibility for public order and defend the new democratic institutions. The task of recruiting and training the *Asaltos* was the work of Maura and Galarza, who drew from the ranks of the socialist and Republican parties. The *Asaltos* were portrayed as the flagship of the new legality which, unlike the old police or the Civil Guard, were lauded by the authorities as a thoroughly democratic force.

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<sup>33</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.156-157; *La Batalla*, 15 April, 1 May 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April, 1 May 1931; Besteiro cited in Manuel Azaña, *Obras completas. El transito de un mundo histórico*, Mexico, 1967, vol.3, p.294; Maura, *Así cayó*, p.206; Borrás, *España*, pp.109-110

There was, however, a fundamental contradiction with the new force, for while Maura and Galarza hoped to fashion what they intended to be a truly democratic force, they refused to break with monarchist traditions of recruiting military chiefs to train the police. Thus, the *Asaltos* were headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Agustín Muñoz Grandes and, like the Civil Guard, had an élitist, unaccountable military command.<sup>34</sup> Muñoz Grandes imposed military values on the new force and discipline inside the *Asaltos* was said to be 'extraordinarily rigid'. In the view of Manuel Ballbé, 'other than their name and uniform', little differentiated the *Asaltos* from the Civil Guard.<sup>35</sup>

Maura could not hide the pride that he felt for his new creation and he eulogised the six-foot plus *Asaltos* as 'a perfect force', characterised by 'a truly exceptional physical constitution'. Motorised, and highly mobile, the *Asaltos* were specifically designed to meet the challenges posed to public order by street convulsions. Thereafter the *Asaltos* would neutralise the disturbance, make any necessary arrests, and retreat with the peace re-established, leaving no casualties behind them other than among those who dared cross the frontier of legality. To avoid the 'excesses' of past essays in urban social control, the conventional arms of the *Asaltos* were the revolver and a two-and-a-half foot long truncheon, weaponry which unlike the long-range armament of the Civil Guard, encouraged the new force to move into the thick of the fray and reimpose public order not with terror but by singling out 'ringleaders'. The *Asaltos* were, however, fully militarised, and, in the event of a serious challenge to public order, they were equipped with heavier weaponry, such as machine guns. This made the force the veritable shock troops of the Republican state on the streets.<sup>36</sup>

The recruitment of the *Asaltos* began in June 1931 and they made their first appearance on the streets of Barcelona at the end of July. From the beginning material realities revealed the limitations of Republican will, and the recruitment of a new, and

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<sup>34</sup> The expertise of Muñoz Grandes was later deployed in his position as chief of the fascist División Azul, the Spanish volunteers who fought on the Russian Front during World War Two: Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, pp.147-149, 152-153.

<sup>35</sup> Maura, *Así cayó*, pp.274-275; Ballbé, *Orden público*, p.339

<sup>36</sup> Maura, *Así cayó*, pp.274-275; Juan-Siméon Vidarte, *Las Cortes Constituyentes de 1931-1933. Testimonio del primer secretario del Congreso de los Diputados*, Barcelona, 1976, p.293

exclusively Republican security force was restricted by budgetary problems. These financial difficulties placed definite limitations on the reformist, modernising project of the Republicans and in the absence of sufficient numbers of *Asaltos*, the authorities continued to rely on the notorious 'Benemérita'.

The case of Barcelona exemplifies what Ballbé has described as the 'timid renovation' of the police and the absence of any concrete Republican blue-print for the democratisation and reform of the security forces. During his tenure as Civil Governor Companys dragged his heels on a number of important matters and despite the manifest unpopularity of the Brigada Policial especializada en Anarquismo y Sindicalismo and the widespread belief that the force was a hot-bed of monarchist reaction, at the end of April there were still no plans for the abolition of the force. Similarly, it was evident that Companys had no intention of dissolving the Mossos d'Escuadra.<sup>37</sup>

The piece-meal attitude of both the Madrid and Barcelona authorities towards police reform was fully highlighted by a trip of Galarza to the Catalan capital at the end of May 1931. During a number of press conferences both Galarza and Companys were unanimous that the Barcelona police was 'absolutely lacking in efficiency', a 'completely useless organisation' that was in immediate need of 'a complete and total reorganisation'. However, they also asserted that the force could become 'a more efficient instrument' simply by removing a few 'bad eggs'. Having shelved their earlier plans for an ambitious modernisation of the security forces, the Republicans preferred to place trusted figures in important command positions within the police to oversee the removal of high profile monarchists from the force. Accordingly, the austere Arturo Menéndez became Chief of Police in Barcelona. Described by an admirer as an 'important figure in the Spanish Revolution', Menéndez was a veteran of the Provisional Republican Revolutionary Committee and he had accompanied Azaña to assume control of the Ministry of War in

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<sup>37</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 16, 25, 29 April 1931

Madrid on the night of April 14. He also had a severe personality, which was indelibly marked by his military background as an army artillery captain.<sup>38</sup>

Now that the Republicans had called the revolution to a halt, Menéndez was briefed to prepare the police for the conservation of the post-monarchical political order. In organisational terms, Menéndez continued the strategy of removing the most disreputable monarchists from the Barcelona police force. However, because anti-Republican sentiments were so great, it was evident the consistent application of this policy carried the danger that the force would be bereft of officers. Instead, the programme of Menéndez for 'Republicanising' the security forces centred on buying the loyalty of unreliable elements by increasing morale through a system of wage and pension increases. By such an improvement in the status and pay of the police it was hoped that the old causes of corruption within the force would be eroded, while the loyalty of those officers who disliked the Republic might also be won over. However, the substance of the Barcelona police actually changed very little. The notoriously pro-monarchist Barcelona police remained largely unpurged, while the *Brigada Policial especializada en Anarquismo y Sindicalismo*, the despised political police of the monarchy, underwent little more than a token name change to become the *Brigada de Investigación Social*, the political police of the Republic. Equally, many figures associated with Spain's authoritarian past remained within the Barcelona judiciary. Consequently, when Catalan Republicans claimed in June 1931 that 'a new order in the rule of law' was about to begin, they failed to mention that this would be enforced by yesterdays' police and bureaucracy.<sup>39</sup>

This represented a fundamental weakness in the Republican project, because if the legal processes were to be reformed to provide equality before the law, the same also had to hold true for the undemocratic police who in the decades before the Republic had

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<sup>38</sup> Ballbé, *Orden público*, p.336; *Las Noticias*, 23 May 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.156-158; Manuel Azaña, *Obras completas. Memorias Políticas y de Guerra*, Mexico, 1968, vol.4, p.284

<sup>39</sup> The details of the reorganisation of the police are taken from the daily press for 1931, especially *Las Noticias*, 23 May 1931 and *L'Opinió*, 9 June 1931

revealed an institutionalised hatred of the working class.<sup>40</sup> Herein, the separation of political policing from everyday policing and the end to the involvement of civil police in the class struggle, was a fundamental necessity. Equally pressing was a break in the traditional interpretation of social protest as a simple question of public order. It is difficult to say that either were effected.

The experience of the Catalan capital also revealed the failure of the new authorities to revise police selection processes, even though Menéndez had earlier recognised that these changes were a vital prerequisite to both professionalise the force and to end the clientelism that had pervaded the police during the years of monarchy.<sup>41</sup> However, despite the best democratic intentions, the corrupt practice of recruiting police from the clientele of the governing powers continued, even if the clientele changed. This can be seen in the manner in which the *Asaltos* were drawn from among the Republican and Socialist parties, a favouritism that always promised to generate patronage when it came to the allocation of what were not always well paid jobs but which were, nevertheless, pensioned.

Political patronage and partisanship outweighed professional criterion in the appointments to the Policia Municipal, the Council-organised police force. Throughout the Republican period applicants for posts in the Policia Municipal in neighbouring l'Hospitalet emphasised their 'long-standing Republican sympathies' or 'Republican spirit' far more than any practical or professional skills that might equip them for a lifetime's service in the police. In other circumstances, rather than dwell on their human resources, candidates opportunistically mentioned their 'established acquaintance' with a leading local Republican or, their simple 'desire to serve the Republic'. Requests to the Republican mayor for recommendations for the *Asaltos* were of a similarly sycophantic nature, suggesting that the police had not become professionalised and that the force remained an escape route from unemployment or even the last option before the workhouse. Equally, many of the declarations of 'Republican integrity' by applicants

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 1.1

<sup>41</sup> Trinidad Fernández, *La defensa*, p.304

were often immediately accompanied by moving words of reassurance that 'as a Father of four and currently unemployed' the applicant would work 'diligently and honourably in the persecution of police tasks'. Other applications for the police also indicated that aspirant agents were motivated less by the a professional desire to serve as a policeman than by the absence of more acceptable work. Moreover, these questionable recruitment procedures meant that some applicants who were evidently unsuitable for the force were still admitted. In one telling case, the Barcelona Police authority refused to grant a gun licence to a newly recruited Municipal Guard in l'Hospitalet because, according to police archives, the newly appointed agent in question had a record for 'the crime of assault on several occasions'.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.5. The 'Republic of Order' in the Workplace

The labour legislation developed by Largo Caballero from the Labour Ministry was the concomitant of the 'Republic of Order' in the industrial relations sphere.<sup>43</sup> The labour reforms of the 1930s signified an acceleration of the wider European process whereby from the turn of the century onwards state intervention was deployed to arbitrate and channel the conflicts between capital and labour. This process offered some benefits to organised labour, such as the guarantees it gave for permanent trade union representation in the workplace. Yet by maintaining the existing power relations inside the factories in the face of a strong and organised labour movement, state interventionism also served the interests of employers.

The reforms of the first Republican-Socialist administration represented a stronger centralisation of the powers of the Labour Ministry to police the workplace and guarantee the existing frontiers of control. The new *Ley de contratos de trabajo* defined the duties of workers, which included the need to work diligently, to loyally follow the

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<sup>42</sup> Correspondència de l'Ajuntament de l'Hospitalet, 1931-1936 (AHLL); Jefatura Superior de Barcelona to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 5 December 1933 (AHLL)

<sup>43</sup> In keeping with the predominantly urban object of this study, my discussion of Largo Caballero's legislation focuses exclusively on its urban and industrial significance. For an appraisal of the impact of Largo Caballero's reforms in a rural context see Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform, passim.*, Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.56-59, 75-76.



instructions of management, to cede the product of their labour to the employer and to comply with all social laws. As for the other side of production, the employers were required to 'respect the dignity of labour', maintain the workplace and machinery 'in proper condition' and pay wages promptly. Meanwhile, in the eventuality that the labour contract was terminated, to avoid favouritism and blacklisting, employers were asked to provide the worker with a certificate of employment, outlining their labour skills, without making any reference to the qualities of the worker nor their political attitudes or syndical affinities. In recognition of the dire conditions facing labour, Largo Caballero also introduced a number of palliatives in a bid to enhance the image of the state in the minds of workers, including a decree that employers should pay wages to those operatives who were absent on the 'national fiesta' of April 14-15. More enduringly, on May Day the Republic adhered to the International Labour Organisation of the League of Nations and the convention establishing the eight hour day. This was followed by the *Ley de la República*, which made the eight hour working day part of Spanish law, a vital measure, given that most industrial accidents occurred in the last hour of work. Largo Caballero hoped that by making concessions to organised labour the industrial working class would see that it could peacefully pursue its objectives through the state, thereby allowing the Republic to cement its new institutions.<sup>44</sup>

The centre-piece of the new labour legislation was the *Ley de jurados mixtos*. This law created 'mixed juries', state-regulated arbitration courts channels which, it was believed, would facilitate the peaceful resolution of collective workplace bargaining within a stable system of industrial relations. The *Ley de jurados mixtos* specified that the 'mixed juries' were to be informed of all industrial disputes and that there should be an opportunity for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. If trade unions called a strike before attempts at arbitration had been exhausted, the Labour Ministry would declare the stoppage illegal. Thereafter the semi-judicial Jurados, made up of six worker

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<sup>44</sup> Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, pp.259, 331-333. For the legislation see Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social, *Labor realizada desde la proclamación de la República hasta el 8 de septiembre de 1932*, Madrid n.d., *passim*.

representatives and six employer delegates, along with a president and a vice-president nominated by Largo Caballero, would arbitrate. In the eventuality of a hung decision or a lack of consensus, the government-appointed president would cast a deciding vote, the result of which would be legally binding on both parties. By transferring jurisdiction over wages, conditions and redundancies to the neutral Jurados, workplace relations would therefore become pacified, with naked industrial conflicts a thing of the past.

Echoing the reasoning of the Republicans on the issue of public order, it was implicit in Largo Caballero's legislation that old style syndical struggles were obsolete. According to the Labour Minister, because the Jurados allowed for the betterment of workers on the basis of discipline and transigence, there could be 'no strikes, nor complaints nor protests. The first thing now is to consolidate the régime'. This was an eloquent reflexion of Largo Caballero's overriding obsession with the need to maintain 'authority' and 'discipline' in industrial affairs. Indeed, the Jurados were based on the *Comités paritarios*, the corporate structures of the dictatorship and they were, as Nick Rider notes, 'an extension of the traditional authoritarian interventionism of the state, carrying out its customary role of maintaining order'.<sup>45</sup>

The endeavours of Largo Caballero to renovate the attitudes of workers towards the state through these reforms were highly contradictory. Firstly, at a time when the number of jobless was increasing, the reforms offered help only to the declining number of those in work. Hence, the swelling ranks of the jobless were effectively left to their own devices.

Secondly, the new legislation limiting the working day carried opt-clauses designed for those sectors where production had to rise to meet demand. This was the case in the Barcelona textile industry where the maximum legal working week was 66 hours during the years 1931 and 1933. Like all the Republican laws, the legislation on the working day required the goodwill of the employers to pay the extra hours as overtime, something that was far from certain. Similarly, by dividing additional work

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<sup>45</sup> *El Sol*, 19 December 1931; Rider, *Anarchism*, p.625

among existing workers, the labour legislation fostered new divisions within working conditions, because there was no attempt to bring the out of work back into the factory, thereby increasing the gulf between the employed and the unemployed grew wider.

Thirdly, while the Jurados offered some solace to skilled sections of the workforce, their ponderous procedures were ill-suited to the uncertain context facing the unskilled. In the case of Barcelona, not only did the Jurados clash with the local practices of the labour movement, but they seemed of little relevance to the predominantly unskilled proletariat of a city where temporary contracts abounded in the wake of desperate social conditions.

Lastly, by restricting the right to strike of workers, Largo Caballero's reform package undermined the potency of the industrial stoppage, the most important weapon available to workers in their dealings with employers. This reflected the mistaken belief that capitalists and proletarians could endure a period of arbitration with equal ease, a premise that, in keeping with so much Republican thought, ignored material realities and assumed that legal equality between labour and capital was a real possibility.

The substance of the new labour laws was thoroughly in keeping with the reformist and corporatist syndical tradition of the UGT, whose predominantly semi-skilled and skilled members favoured class collaboration to mobilisation and were prepared to submit their professional claims to arbitration. By the same token, the Jurados were poorly suited to industrial conditions in Catalonia, where the employers had always rejected the presence of independent workplace unions, where the unions had never enjoyed any kind of stable existence and where change seemed to require more than piece-meal reform. Moreover, the gradualism of the labour courts was the complete antithesis of the traditions of direct action prevalent among the bulk of the Barcelona proletariat, which were commonly seen as the only means of extracting concessions from an aggressive bourgeoisie. Predictably, given the suspicions and rivalries between the two unions, the CNT dubbed the Jurados as a 'social and judicial monstrosity [designed] to trap the proletariat'. Presaging a confrontation between the new authorities and the unions, the Barcelona CNT Local Federation and the Catalan Regional Committee both

resolved to reject the Jurados. Nevertheless, showing a singular lack of flexibility, Largo Caballero made it known that the Jurados were to be imposed throughout the Spanish state, thereby criminalising long-standing CNT practises, such as active picketing. Given that their methods were common knowledge, the CNT leasership interpreted the intransigence of Largo Caballero as a deliberate provocation of the CNT.<sup>46</sup>

Largo Caballero's insistence that *all* unions comply with the Jurados was part of a deliberate plan to use his position within the Republican government to gain a legal advantage for the UGT and, simultaneously, strengthen his standing as Secretary-General of the socialist union federation. According to Víctor Alba, the 'organisational patriotism' of Largo Caballero was bound up with the desire of the socialist union leadership to re-establish an organised presence in Catalonia, particularly Barcelona, the industrial and revolutionary capital of Spain and the historic birthplace of the UGT, the very city the union bureaucracy had earlier left for the calmer, bureaucratic ambience of Madrid. It was this quest of the socialist bureaucracy to outdo the CNT that had already led it to collaborate with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, an ill-fated opportunist exercise that compromised both the UGT and the PSOE in Catalonia. This discredit was reflected in the membership of the Catalan socialist movement: in 1929 the PSOE had a mere 230 members in Catalonia, while the UGT had grown to only 16,683 members. These puny socialist groups were dwarfed by the 40,000 members claimed by the Barcelona CNT Builders' Union alone.<sup>47</sup>

The re-legalisation of the CNT in April 1930 and its subsequent resurgence, saw the end to any possibility that the UGT might acquire a monopoly of trade union activity. After the proclamation of the Republic, the CNT expanded even more rapidly, both in Spain and in Catalonia, as its unions became the receptacle for thousands of expectant workers. In May 1931 the Catalan CNT admitted 100,000 new members in a single

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<sup>46</sup> Acción, 29 March 1930; Solidaridad Obrera, 8-9, 22, 30 May, 13 June, 4, 10 July 1931

<sup>47</sup> Alba, Els problemes, p.90; Manuel Pérez Ledesma, 'La primera etapa de la Unión General de Trabajadores (1888-1917). Planteamiento sindical y formas de organización' in Balcells (ed.), Teoría, pp.115-171; Pere Gabriel Sirvent, 'Sindicalismo y sindicatos socialistas en Cataluña. La UGT, 1888-1938', Historia Social, 8, 1990, pp.47-71; Balcells, Marxismo, p.15

month and by August the Confederation accounted for over half of the organised Spanish working class, claiming 400,000 affiliates in Catalonia alone. Meanwhile, the Barcelona CNT had managed to organise a staggering 58% of the most rebellious sections of the city's proletariat.<sup>48</sup>

The UGT leadership was intensely jealous of the growth of its rivals and Largo Caballero was concerned to contain the CNT in its Catalan bastion. To this end, the UGT began a new weekly trade union publication, La Internacional in June 1931. Two months later the PSOE launched a daily newspaper in Barcelona, La Tribuna Socialista. However, despite both the patronage of their socialist allies in Madrid and the financial stability provided by the essentially skilled and employed workers of the Catalan UGT, the weak roots of the Catalan socialist movement could not sustain a vibrant movement. La Tribuna Socialista collapsed after two months, while La Internacional managed a lowly 28 issues, staggering on until December 1931.<sup>49</sup>

These disheartening circumstances led the UGT bureaucracy to rely on the labour courts in an attempt to gain a legal advantage over the CNT and expand *ugetismo* in Catalonia. Josep Jover Sarroca, the president of the Catalan UGT, was appointed by Largo Caballero as head of the Jurados, where he was supported by an army of state bureaucrats and socialist party functionaries. Increasingly, Largo Caballero drove the Catalan CNT leadership into a corner on the question of the Jurados. Implicit in all this was an apparent assumption that the CNT would be either forced to break with their traditions and accept the Jurados and, therefore, become like the UGT, or that it would reject the Jurados and clash with the state, thereby provoking a debilitating membership crisis in the Confederation, whose rank-and-file would at last appreciate the superiority of socialist methods.

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<sup>48</sup> Vega i Massana, El Trentisme, p.105, n.1; CRT, Memorias de los comicios de la regional catalana celebrados los días 31 de mayo y 1 de junio, y 2, 3 y 4 de agosto de 1931, Barcelona 1931, pp.50-56; Balcells, Crisis, p.192

<sup>49</sup> La Tribuna Socialista ran from 12 August-11 October 1931, while La Internacional ran from 13 June-19 December 1931

Largo Caballero's strategy of using the institutions of Republic to foster the UGT and attack CNT was a highly dangerous, potentially explosive game. By using his position as Labour Minister to pursue what *cenetistas* believed were his long-standing sectarian goals of organisational aggrandisement and syndical imperialism, Largo Caballero was making some unions freer than others and clashing with the promises of syndical freedom made to the CNT during the opposition to the monarchy. Consequently, Largo Caballero, far more than anyone else, was creating the conditions for a wholesale rupture between the Confederation and the new régime.<sup>50</sup>

Conflict between the CNT and the UGT in Barcelona was further ensured by the social base of *ugetismo* in the Catalan capital. While it would be a mistake to suggest that the followers of the disbanded Sindicatos Libres simply entered the Catalan UGT after the birth of the Republic, particularly as there were numerous cases of right-wing unions entering the CNT, Rider provides considerable evidence that between 1930-1931 of workers switching to the Barcelona UGT from the Libres. According to Colin Winston, 'in many cases' *ex-libreños* 'occupied leadership positions' in the Catalan UGT. Thus, the mish-mash of skilled and conservative workers who came to rest inside the socialist union in Catalonia during the early stages of the Republic was united by a virulent hatred for the Confederation and its aggressive methods of class struggle. This was especially true of the professional groups of private security guards, a notoriously right-wing sector, who entered the Catalan UGT after the fall of the dictatorship. The most skilled groups of construction workers passed directly from the Libres into the UGT, along with other skilled sectors like pastry chefs and piano makers. It was no surprise, therefore, that the service industries, a traditional source of Libre strength, was the occupational sector where the Catalan UGT enjoyed significant growth between 1930-1931. Meanwhile, in the wood sector, the UGT accepted artisans and even the

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<sup>50</sup> La Publicitat, 24 July 1931

self-employed, sectors that the anarchists viewed as 'the aristocrats within the working class'.<sup>51</sup>

*Cenetistas* were not the only ones alarmed at Largo Caballero's labour laws. In the late 1920s the conviction of Catalan capitalists that they alone should control the workplace had already led bourgeois pressure groups to recoil against the corporatist experiments of Primo de Rivera. Similar convictions led the Catalan bourgeoisie to oppose the Jurados. Moreover, employers also regarded Largo Caballero as a 'socialist' and a 'partial' figure in industrial affairs. However, the political context in 1931 presented Catalan industrialists with some complex dilemmas; capitalists were, in the words of Eulàlia Vega i Massana, 'caught between two fires': they were shaken by the sudden demise of the monarchy, but they were also unsettled by the resurgence of CNT unions that were clearly hungry for action. Under these circumstances, Catalan entrepreneurs were, at least for the time being, prepared to accept the Jurados as they promised to uphold 'the principle of authority' in industrial affairs against the threat of 'indiscipline' posed by the CNT.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, while the Catalan bourgeoisie was not necessarily content to see the PSOE in government, it at least identified with Largo Caballero's emphasis on order and legality in the workplace and alongside the extravagant promises of Macià and the CNT, their historic *bête noire*, the Republican Minister for Labour was seen as a 'lesser evil'.

This tactical move was reflected in an editorial in the conservative La Nau, advising capitalists 'loyally to back the progressive implantation of social reforms that will profoundly transform the relations between capital and labour'. In return, La Nau was confident that the Republican-Socialist government would be 'the guarantor of public order'. In similar vein, La Vanguardia maintained that the 'health of Spain'

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<sup>51</sup> Bueso, Recuerdos, vol. 1, pp. 103-109; Rider, Anarchism, Ch. 11; Winston, La clase trabajadora, p. 281; Solidaridad Obrera, 4-6 June 1931; El Luchador, 14 August 1931

<sup>52</sup> Berenguer, De la Dictadura, pp. 151-152; Federación de Fabricantes de Hilados y Tejidos de Cataluña, Memoria del año 1929, Barcelona, 1930, pp. 11-12; J. Estadella and J. Aran, El fracaso de los jurados mixtos, hacia una profunda reforma de los organismos de política social, Madrid, 1936, *passim*.; Balcells, Crisis económica, pp. 189-190; Cabrera, La patronal, pp. 15, 256; Eulàlia Vega i Massana, La Confederació Nacional del Treball i els Sindicats d'Oposició a Catalunya i el País Valencià (1930-1936), unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 3 vols., Barcelona University, 1986, p. 276

required labour reform and the conservative daily celebrated the responsible role of the UGT and the PSOE as 'enemies of Bolshevism and anarchism'. Highlighting the concord between conservative opinion and the Republican government, La Vanguardia argued that there was no justification for violence in a truly democratic régime, because 'the principle of freedom and justice for all' relegates the demands of the unions to second place. Similarly, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional counselled respect for the law and grudgingly accepted the place of the Jurados as 'a good instrument' for 'conciliation and arbitration, which avoid the violence of social conflicts', while simultaneously maintaining 'the principle of authority'.<sup>53</sup>

The support of employers for 'authority' and 'legality' did not, however, guarantee their compliance with the new legislation. The limitations of the reformist PSOE strategy were rapidly illustrated by the intransigent obduracy of the Catalan bourgeoisie, whose recidivistic attitude provoked a number of industrial disputes early on in the Republic. For example, many employers refused to pay wages to those workers who were absent celebrating the arrival of the new régime in the streets on April 14-15. Some capitalists defiantly responded to these wage claims, advising their workers: 'let the Republic feed you!' Meanwhile, in a bid to maintain profit margins, the Unión Industrial Metalúrgica, the largest employers' federation in the metal sector, illegally maintained a 70 hour week and successfully implored capitalists in all branches of the industry to refuse overtime payments and, generally, to ignore the new laws governing the length of the working day. Employers needed little encouragement and they continued to ignore legislation regulating child labour and workplace health and safety. There were numerous cases of employers refusing to pay statutory holidays for their operatives and, in an attempt to avoid their legal responsibility for proletarian leisure, some entrepreneurs sacked their workers before holiday time. Moreover, employers periodically victimised those union militants who demanded the implementation of the new laws, telling activists: 'Let the Republic give you work!' Despite the sackings, the bourgeoisie denied unemployment

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<sup>53</sup> La Nau, 24 April 1931; La Vanguardia, 4, 25 July 1931; Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, Memoria... de 1931, p.119



was a problem and joblessness was conveniently attributed to a crisis that it opined was the outcome of social agitation. Meanwhile, capitalists were unanimous that unemployment benefit on an obligatory, institutional level would be both economically ruinous for industry and the state and encourage indolence and vice among the workers.<sup>54</sup>

The CNT picked up the gauntlet laid down by the employers and embarked on a series of industrial actions to enforce Republican legislation and ensure that industrialists complied with the new working hours. The defensive struggle to impose labour laws on the employers served as a bridge to a new syndical offensive, as in the case of the striking CNT land labourers, whose demands for a legal 8-hour day were augmented with new wage demands. The landworkers stoppage spread quickly around the fields and estates surrounding industrial Barcelona, l'Hospitalet and Badalona and intensified further when fishermen and market workers joined them on strike.<sup>55</sup>

The CNT was committed to blocking the untrammelled right of management to sack workers by *fiat* and to reintegrating the unemployed in the workplace through the abolition of intensive forms of labour like piece-work. In July and August, this culminated in a veritable explosion of conflicts that affected individual workshops, as well as entire industries. In response to continuing provocations and redundancies, 1,100 workers downed tools at the end of July at La Seda de Barcelona, a French-owned artificial silk factory in Prat de Llobregat, while 40,000 metalworkers stayed out for the whole of August. Strikes also occurred in vital sectors like the docks, the artery of the city, and at the Telefónica, the main communication centre. Overall, there were 41 strikes in Barcelona city in August. Meanwhile, the Builders' Union, which was burdened by soaring unemployment, combined a call for union recognition with demands for a six

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<sup>54</sup> Soto Carmona, El trabajo, p.592; Trabajo, 15 September 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 17 June, 23 July 1931; Enrique Martín, Recuerdos de un militante de la CNT, Barcelona, 1979, p.51; Comercio y Navegación, May 1931

<sup>55</sup> Trabajo, 15 September 1931; Las Noticias, 19-20 June 1931; La Vanguardia, 12-13, 19, 22, 26, 29 August 1931

hour day, wage increases, sickness, unemployment and health benefits, and workplace representation in production, administration, hygiene and hiring.<sup>56</sup>

This unprecedented wave of mobilisations was bound up with the resurrection of the CNT and the new-found confidence this brought to Catalan workers, who felt ever more confident to make up ground lost in the preceding eight years. Equally, to offset the twin scourge of joblessness and favouritism in the labour market, the CNT sought to force employers to recruit new operatives exclusively through its own *bolsas de trabajo*, the union labour exchanges. The proven ability of the *bolsas de trabajo* to guarantee access to the labour market and safeguard working conditions and wages within a closed shop was immensely attractive to the unskilled, underemployed and jobless of Barcelona. As the mood of the workers became electrified, a growing revolutionary spirit was seen among certain sections of the working class. This was evinced by two separate disputes in the Sants and Poblenou districts, where conflicts over working practices, sackings and victimisations culminated in factory occupations, during which the workers took over the running of their workplaces.<sup>57</sup>

Although under intense syndical pressure the bourgeoisie sometimes conceded ground on issues of wages and hours, in 1931 this was made difficult by the tremors of recession. Equally, the spread of the economic crisis encouraged confrontational attitudes on the part of the bourgeoisie in those sectors where business had slackened and where they had little to lose from a strike. Meanwhile, cynically substituting its own class interests for the general interests of society, Catalan employers appealed to the Madrid government to halt the CNT 'policy of destroying the entire industrial structure and piece-work' that would culminate in the collapse of 'our economic progress, the ruin our levels of consumption, housing, clothing, leisure and the education of our children'.<sup>58</sup>

There was even less scope for discussion over issues of industrial control. Management resisted all CNT demands to recognise their *bolsas de trabajo*, alleging

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<sup>56</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 5 May 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 19, 21, 24 July, 1-29 August 1931; *Comercio y Navegación*, August-September 1931; Vega i Massana, *La Confederació*, pp.522, 1060

<sup>57</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 16 July, 23 August 1931

<sup>58</sup> *La Veu de Catalunya*, 20 August 1931

that they limited the freedom of capitalists to hire and fire, that they constituted a flagrant contravention of the threshold of industrial control and an unwarranted attack on the authority of the boss. The employer-union clash over the *bolsas de trabajo* became a major skirmish. Petrified by the scale of union mobilisations, some on the right began to look back to the 'the golden age of the dictatorship', when 'strikes and street disturbances existed only in the memory'. La Vanguardia attributed the 'spirit of pure revolt' and the 'multiplicity of social conflicts' to what it saw as the decay in moral standards precipitated by the demise of the monarchy. Hypocritically, while the employers flaunted labour legislation, La Vanguardia counselled 'respect' and 'obedience' in the hope that 'the working masses will accept the law'. Displaying a similarly selective attitude towards the new Republican legislation, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional hid from the demands of the CNT behind the Jurados, endorsing the arbitration courts as a peaceful solution to industrial conflicts and using them as an excuse not to treat with the Confederation. Moreover, the UGT and its methods provided the Catalan bourgeoisie with a respite from the demands of the CNT. For instance, the management at the Telefónica submitted working conditions to arbitration in the Jurados, while employers on the port used the 'disciplined mass' of the UGT as a counter-balance to the CNT.

Industrialists interpreted the spread of labour conflictivity, not as the product of a class struggle based on antithetical interests but, as the result of the sinister imposition of ideologies that exploited an essentially docile proletariat in order to advance the private interests of 'agitators'. Accordingly, because protest was viewed by the capitalists as the machination of a perverse amoral minority, they asserted that the forced separation of the CNT insurgents from the rest of society would bring 'social peace' and the pacification of the working class. The bourgeoisie put new pressures on the Madrid government to initiate a draconian policy to restore 'the principle of authority' and end the 'morbid pleasure' derived by the CNT 'sport' of striking and the 'cheap blackmail' of its 'systematic campaign to force up the level of wages and cut output levels'. In another highly telling note to the Republican government in Madrid, the Cámara de Comercio y Navegación, the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce, spoke of the 'gravity' of the social

situation in Barcelona and the worsening economic crisis caused by a strikewave which, it was alleged, was destroying the industry of Catalonia and generally 'strangling economic life'.<sup>59</sup>

The Madrid government saw the CNT strikes in an equally repressive light. Maura viewed rank-and-file union demands as a conscious offensive against the Republic, a campaign to wreck the régime and a further example of the 'commotion' he so disliked to see on the streets. In the words of Azaña, Maura 'vomited draconian decrees' in Cabinet meetings, due to his determination to calm the fears of big business and foreign capital and clamp down on 'subversion'. Azaña reflected that what was required was an 'energetic policy to make the Republic feared'. This view was shared by the PSOE-UGT, who were equally concerned with the defence of Republican order. Increasingly, a consensus formed around the view that the CNT was the instigator of random terror. Crisol, a Madrid-based left-Republican paper, likened the 'violence' of the CNT to that of the Nazis, while El Socialista, the main PSOE daily, denounced the editorial board of Solidaridad Obrera as 'gunmen' (*pistoleros*). Meanwhile, La Internacional, the ephemeral Barcelona-based UGT weekly saw *cenetistas* as the 'open enemies of the new régime' and asserted that 'the consolidation of the Republic and the conservation of this democratic régime is worth far more than the CNT and its pernicious leaders'. Interpreting radicalism as an act of sedition against the nascent democratic order, Luis Araquistain, Largo Caballero's lieutenant, attacked the 'irresponsibility' of the CNT, while pledging the commitment of the UGT to defuse social tension and police the proletariat within the new Republican order.<sup>60</sup>

The stance of the authorities towards the mobilisations of the CNT was vividly seen in the strike at the ITT-owned Telefónica. Under the pretext that the CNT had not exhausted the legal channels for arbitration provided by the Jurados, the strike action

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<sup>59</sup> Cabrera, La patronal, p.255; La Internacional, 25 July 1931; El Trabajo Nacional, November-December 1931; Comercio y Navegación, November 1931; La Vanguardia, 19, 23-24 July, 13 August 1931; Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, Memoria...de 1931, p.122

<sup>60</sup> Azaña, Obras, vol.4, pp.36, 93; Jackson, The Spanish Republic, p.43; Solidaridad Obrera, 21 July 1931; Crisol, 11 June 1931; El Socialista, 9, 13 June 1931; La Internacional, 18 July 1931; El Sol, 14 June, 21 July 1931

was declared illegal by the government on its very first day. Maura claimed that the Telefónica strike was 'political' and called for a ban of the rebellious unions which, he believed, should feel 'the full force of the law'. Even though the telecommunications sector was the preserve of the very rich and commercial bodies, the government justified its intervention in the conflict on the grounds that it was a public service. Meanwhile, the Telefónica conflict became bound up with the inter-union struggles between the CNT and the UGT. This was recognised by the British Consul-General in Barcelona who observed that:

'the victory of the strikers...would be a serious blow to the cause of law-and-order, as it would immensely increase the power of the CNT, now the only considerable force in Catalonia. Success in this strike would mean that it would be practically supreme in this part of Spain and that its power would be increased in other parts of the country, where hitherto it has not been able to make much headway against the UGT'.

The PSOE-UGT, therefore, saw the opportunity presented by the strike to deal a body-blow to their syndical rivals and openly counselled scabbing and recruited new workers to cover strikers. Given that the UGT was compromised by the militancy of the CNT, Largo Caballero's opposition to the CNT was even more radical than that of Maura. The Labour Minister emphasised that he would tolerate no negotiation in the dispute between employers and the strike committee. Instead, Largo Caballero encouraged talks between the UGT and ITT in the Jurados, pointing to the possibility of a piece-meal reform of working conditions and a greater share of the workforce for the UGT.<sup>61</sup>

During the summer strike wave of 1931 official discourse came to resemble that of the old monarchist authorities and was increasingly dominated by picket violence. While it had a strong outward appearance of intimidation, picketing was open to diverse interpretations. For the workers, active picketing was a necessary implementation of class will, proletarian violence applied to men as well as women who broke class

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<sup>61</sup> Maura, *Así cayó*, pp.281-6; *La Vanguardia*, 7, 24 July 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 5, 10, 24 July 1931; *El Socialista*, 3, 11 July 1931; Azaña, *Obras*, vol.4, p.36; *Las Noticias*, 2, 10 July 1931; FO371/15774/W8648/46/41: Consul-General King, 18 July 1931 (PRO)

discipline. Strikes represented highly emotional situations for workers and the decision to down tools meant foregoing the meagre comforts enjoyed by the proletarian family. While money might be forthcoming from other family members or the pawnshop, in general terms, the strike presaged an intensification of relations between the striker, their communities and the unions, all of which had to be physically defended against 'scabs' and the police. Meanwhile, stoppages in sectors with relatively high unemployment, such as brickmakers and barbers, generated even greater dynamics of confrontation as the unemployed, aware that a strike victory would almost certainly raise the chance of a return to the workplace, vigorously involved themselves in picketing duties, arranging 'hospital visits' for 'scabs'. Confirming the efficacy of such tactics, recalcitrant employers often acceded to union demands only after they had been forced into a corner by picket violence, as happened in a particularly violent barbers strike in the summer, during which the owners allowed wage rises, recognised the CNT and its *bolsa de trabajo* following repeated attacks on salons.<sup>62</sup>

The authorities ignored the virulence of the social situation and the merits of the strikers' cause, viewing picket violence in exclusively coercive terms. This emphasis on 'coercion' was part of a drive to construct a consensus against the CNT. Carles Esplà, the less liberal successor appointed by Maura to replace Companys as Barcelona Civil Governor, condemned picketing because 'the streets are for everybody'. Meanwhile Largo Caballero told journalists that the CNT was criminal, expounding that while 'we [i.e. the UGT] work with ideas, they work with pistols'. Dissociating the causes of disputes from their effects, the authorities portrayed strikes as wanton attacks on the collectivity that followed political rather than economic motives. An example of this was provided by the suggestions of the Republican press that the pickets in the land labourers strike were preventing lorries from entering the city because they were bent on starving the city of food. By locating strikes within the framework of public order, Republican

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<sup>62</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 7, 28 May 1931; La Vanguardia, 19, 22 July, 5, 16 August 1931; Las Noticias, 29 May, 16 June, 27-28 November 1931; El Día Gráfico, 27 November 1931; Martín, Recuerdos, pp.86-87, 91-92; Trabajo, 15 August 1931

thinking paralleled that of the monarchy and came to accept that repression could be unleashed to decapitate the labour movement. Accordingly, Maura issued instructions that 'energetic measures' be deployed against strikers, while Galarza, the Republican security chief, ordered police to shoot saboteurs on sight.<sup>63</sup>

Arrests of pickets became commonplace, as the authorities revealed a profound sensitivity to claims of employers against syndical 'coercion'. One militant who told an employer that he would be 'made to comply' with union demands was arrested for 'threatening behaviour'. With the judicial net widening against pickets 'Miss Telefónica 1931' was detained in Madrid following an incident involving strikers and police, while in Barcelona a group of young children was arrested in the Barri xino for taunting a telephonist with chants of 'Maria the scab'. Seeing the favourable attitude of the Republican authorities to their requests for protection, employers revealed their own inflammatory extremism and adopted a strategy of tension. Thus, after an official ban on strike meetings in the metal sector, management at the Casa Girona metalworks seized the initiative, declaring a lock-out, victimising large numbers of union activists and sacking 1,500 operatives. Employers also relied on new 'scorched earth' tactics, ending strikes by closing the factory and relocating, an 'all-or-nothing' strategy that left tens of thousands of workers unemployed in Spain in the first year or so of the Republic. The strike at La Seda de Barcelona ended in precisely this way, leaving over 1,000 workers unemployed. Meanwhile, in the Telefónica conflict, management announced its decision to sack all strikers and was so obdurate that even La Vanguardia was moved to condemn heavy-handed employers as a danger to 'civic peace'.<sup>64</sup>

The combination of employer intransigence and official hostility raised the stakes in the industrial arena, producing a generalised increase in clashes between pickets and the security forces. In turn, pickets asserted their own right to self-defence and became

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<sup>63</sup> La Vanguardia, 7, 24 July, 1931; El Sol, 4 June 1931; Las Noticias, 14, 25 June 1931; L'Opinió, 9 August 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 19 July 1931; Maura, Así cayó, pp.281-286; La Tierra, 8 July 1931

<sup>64</sup> Las Noticias, 17-21, 25 June 1931; La Vanguardia, 9, 19, 24, 27 July, 11, 13, 19-20 August 1931; L'Opinió, 10 July 1931; Soto Carmona, El trabajo, p.494; Solidaridad Obrera, 10-13 June, 10-11, 20 July 1931

even more convinced that intensive picketing and maximum solidarity were integral to triumph. Solidaridad Obrera aided the work of pickets by printing the names and addresses of those who broke 'class discipline' by 'scabbing'. As the first Republican summer wore on the social situation in Barcelona steadily deteriorated. The arrival of the *Asaltos* on the streets did little to calm the situation. The new police force was deployed by the authorities to impose 'lightning bans' on strike assemblies and escort 'scabs' into work. This was quickly followed by a number of clashes between the *Asaltos* and pickets. Around the Carrer d'Avinyó telephone exchange, in the narrow streets of the Gothic Quarter, these skirmishes were becoming almost ritualistic, as small groups of pickets gathered to meet shifts as they went to and from work; on one occasion an attack by a group of pickets successfully drew the *Asaltos* away from the 'scabs', whereupon the unprotected blacklegs were attacked by another squad of pickets.<sup>65</sup>

As the numbers of strikes multiplied, the police became seriously overstretched. To compensate for the growing strains on the security forces perfunctory, 'conveyor-belt' trials were introduced for pickets, summer police leave was curtailed and instances of police brutality towards pickets became more commonplace. In a case of 'preventive brutality' that would not have been out of place during the monarchy, a group of workers were detained by the Republican police in the proletarian district of Clot and, for no apparent reason, beaten up. The Republican authorities also resorted to arbitrary practices like detention without trial, a method that the CNT saw as a recrudescence of the repression that workers had faced under the monarchy. During the Telefónica strike the Republican-Socialist government detained some 2,000 *cenetistas* throughout the Spanish state, the majority from Barcelona, many of whom were not brought to court but yet remained incarcerated without trial. Another example of the legacy of the monarchy within the 'Republic of Order' came when a speaking tour by Durruti in provincial Catalonia was interrupted by the Civil Governor of Girona, who had the anarchist veteran arrested to face trial for the 'crimes' he had committed during the

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<sup>65</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 7-21 July, 20 August 1931; La Vanguardia, 23, 31 July, 5, 30 August, 1-2 September 1931



monarchy. The workers of Girona, meanwhile, felt the obsession with the past was inimical to the new spirit of Republican freedom and they launched a general strike that spread to surrounding towns, eventually winning Durruti's release.<sup>66</sup>

Although the Republic was clearly a different type of régime to its predecessors, the mobilisations in the summer of 1931 revealed the extent to which the government was prepared to rely on those military forces whose repressive capacity had been proven during the last 50 years of monarchy and dictatorship. Just one month after the birth of the Republic, in Pasajes, in the Basque Country, the Civil Guard shot eight striking fishermen dead. The Civil Guard was also deployed during the strike at La Seda de Barcelona, in which the force established a temporary encampment near the factory and restricted access to and from the city of Prat de Llobregat. On one occasion the 'Benemérita' fired on the strikers, injuring nine workers. The Civil Guard was also used by the Republican authorities in Barcelona to drive workers out of the workplace to terminate the factory occupations in Poblenou and in Sants.<sup>67</sup>

The Republicans relied heavily on the military to maintain public order. In Girona, during the general protest strike that followed the arrest of Durruti, martial law was declared and the army patrolled the streets. Similarly, in early July half of the total complement of the Barcelona garrison was confined to barracks and soldiers were deployed during the Telefónica strike to guard telephone installations. The same month, in Seville in southern Spain, martial law was declared by Maura, culminating in the artillery bombardment of the Casa de Cornelio, a tavern used by communists as a meeting-place. The police also took advantage of the suspension of civil guarantees in Seville to apply the infamous 'ley de fugas' against four pickets who were later found dead in the city park, while the killers were left at large. Shortly after the Sevillian events, the Barcelona police followed suit, relying on the 'ley de fugas' to kill three

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<sup>66</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 11, 12, 14, 28-31 July, 1 August 1931; L'Opinió, 29 July 1931; La Vanguardia, 16, 30 July, 5, 21, 26, 29-30 August, 30 September 1931; Diego Abad de Santillán, Contribución a la historia del movimiento obrero español. Del advenimiento de la Segunda República a julio de 1936, Mexico City 1971, vol.3, p.71; El Mati, 18-19 June 1931; Ballbé, Orden público, p.320

<sup>67</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 28 May, 1-2, 7-9, 26 August 1931; Las Noticias, 8 May 1931; La Vanguardia, 16 July 1931

construction workers dead, wounding five others. In their defence the police asseverated that they had been fired on first by a prisoner and from rooftops, yet no policemen were wounded. Like in Seville, the Republican authorities accepted the testimony of the security forces and there were neither detentions nor reprimands.<sup>68</sup>

The growing spiral of violence in the city was exacerbated by the Barcelona UGT. Irrespective of its quietist expectancy and its public celebrations of Republican legality, the Catalan UGT perpetrated acts of anti-CNT aggression. Barely one month into the Republic a dispute broke out at the Alena box factory near the port, after *ugetistas* had connived with the employers to replace victimised *cenetistas*. When an unarmed delegation of sacked CNT workers approached the factory to protest, UGT men fired over 100 rounds at the *cenetistas*, injuring 13. This was followed by a similar attack in Blanes, up the coast from Barcelona, which left four *cenetistas* wounded. In neither case did the police make arrests, something that convinced many labour militants that the security forces were only prepared to protect those workers who crossed picket lines. The apparent partiality of the police encouraged numerous worker-activists to assume personal responsibility for their physical security and arms became ever more in evidence on the streets. Meanwhile, the frequency of clashes between *ugetistas* and *cenetistas* grew, most notably during strikes on the port and at Telefónica, where the management replaced CNT members with their socialist rivals. Solidaridad Obrera denounced El Socialista as the 'police journal', the 'echo of the Company' and the 'official organ' of ITT and Catalan capitalists. Amid fears of a bloody union war like that which had once raged between the *cenetistas* and the *libreños*, the CNT promised 'social hygiene' against the incursions of 'UGT turncoats' in Catalonia. At the same time, the physical attacks by *ugetistas* on *cenetistas* heightened suspicions inside the Confederation that the Catalan UGT was 'the vacuum cleaner for all the residues, detritus and scum that are the sad inheritance from past repressive régimes: it has

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<sup>68</sup> El Matí, 18-19 June 1931; La Vanguardia, 9 July 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 8, 24-25 July, 12 September 1931; Maura, Así cayó, pp.206, 240-277; Azaña, Obras, vol.4, p.43; Macarro Vera, Sevilla, pp.47-52; Vidarte, Las Cortes, pp.76, 119; La Vanguardia, 5 September 1931

become the willing receptacle of militant gunmen'. From the level of violence perpetrated it was not entirely unreasonable for the CNT to surmise that its socialist rival 'had picked up all the undesirable elements and a large number of gunmen from the Sindicato Libre', making it 'a cloak for the gunmen and mercenaries of Anido', the former military governor of Barcelona. Moreover, Solidaridad Obrera published evidence of links between *ex-libreños* and members of the Barcelona UGT.<sup>69</sup>

The Catalan capital was, nevertheless, distinct to UGT strongholds like the Spanish capital, where there were strong traditions of corporatism among workers and employers.<sup>70</sup> By contrast, the structure of Catalan capitalism and the attitude of the bourgeoisie engendered particularly open industrial conflicts which vitiated the applicability industrial courts like the Jurados. Consequently, the Madrid government was mistaken in concluding that because the Catalan CNT rejected the Jurados it sought to undermine the Republic. Moreover, although the strike-wave of the summer of 1931 was unprecedented in the history of Catalan industrial relations, it was not a revolutionary attack on the state.

It must be stressed, however, that the strikes were not entirely detached from the political context that accompanied the coming of the Republic. The CNT rank-and-file knew that it had contributed to the fall of the monarchy and had many illusions in the new Republican authorities who had aroused broad expectations of change. The Telefónica conflict was a clear example of this process. ITT had been awarded the Telefónica during the dictatorship, amid much bribery involving the dictator and his son, José Antonio. The result was that ITT was exempted from tax payments, while the state accepted responsibility for all plant maintenance from the public purse. Both the Republicans and the PSOE inveighed against the Telefónica contract as an indictment of

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<sup>69</sup> FO371/15774/W7137/46/41: Report from Consul-General King, 9 June 1931 (PRO); FO371/15773/W7043/46/41, Letter from Sir G. Grahame, 10 June 1931 (PRO); El Diluvio, 13 May 1931; Las Noticias and El Matí, 10 June 1931; L'Opinió, 11 June 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 10-12 June, 1, 7, 9, 14, 23, 30 July, 6, 7, 12, 14, 23 August 1931; Vega i Massana, El Trentisme, pp.135-138; La Internacional, 25 July 1931

<sup>70</sup> Santos Juliá Díaz, Madrid, 1931-1934. De la fiesta popular a la lucha de clases, Madrid, 1984, pp.68-92

business practises under the dictatorship. Prieto publicly referred to the contract as a 'theft (*latrocinio*), an unaccountable robbery (*atracó*)'. The Republicans promised a prompt revision of the contract when they came to power and some within the Republican-Socialist coalition even vowed to nationalise the telecommunications sector. Meanwhile, despite the generosity of its franchise, the Telefónica management quickly became renowned for its draconian industrial policy and the imposition of an authoritarian labour discipline that had removed all job stability among its low-paid workforce.<sup>71</sup>

When the CNT reorganised between 1930-1931 the vehemently anti-union management sacked a number of union militants and supplied their names to the police. By the time the CNT tabled its demands at the Telefónica, the rank-and-file was encouraged by the presence in power of those who had condemned ITT so vocally during the dictatorship. It was also confident of victory because its central demands for better wages and working conditions, and for the readmission of some 1,500 workers sacked by management before the Republic, were hardly of a revolutionary nature. Even when the strike began, the Telefónica workers were optimistic, at best expecting government support for their demands, at least anticipating tolerance towards their claims against the management.<sup>72</sup> However, as we have seen, the transformation of the Republican Revolutionary Committee into the first Republican government was accompanied by an abrupt change in perspectives.

There is another sense in which the strike wave was also connected to the advent of the new régime. In conjunctural terms, the coming of the Republic signified the end of the artificial social equilibrium that had previously been imposed by the dictator. The Republic, therefore, inherited a virulent social context. According to the figures of the International Labour Office, with the exception of the Portuguese, Spanish workers were the lowest paid in Europe, with a spending power six times lower than American

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<sup>71</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, pp.171-175; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 January, 24 February, 12 March, 4, 25, 30 April, 21 May 1931; de Guzmán, *La Segunda República*, p.76

<sup>72</sup> Abad de Santillán, *Contribución*, vol.3, p.71

operatives. Even in recession-torn Germany, wages were twice as high as in Spain, while the food price index was markedly lower. In this sense, the strike mobilisations of 1931 reflected a largely spontaneous collective effort by the most downtrodden elements of the Catalan working class to recoup wages and guarantee a basic level of material existence in the face of a rising cost of living, inflation and unemployment. 'We are the authentic pariahs of the capitalist world', remarked Solidaridad Obrera, and 'it is truly remarkable that the whole population of Spain is not on strike'. Matters were further exacerbated in those industries with high levels of unemployment, where syndical structures were often radicalised as jobless workers flooded into the *bolsas de trabajo*. As the CNT Barbers' Syndicate explained on the eve of a strike action, after seven years of dictatorship union rank-and-filers were in a 'desperate situation...on the point of sinking'. This burdensome legacy could not bring restraint upon workers, whose grievances could not be rapidly redressed through the Jurados. Hence, the unskilled working class articulated its aspirations through the CNT, in the form of a generalised strike offensive in pursuit of 'bread-and-butter' demands and anti-unemployment measures which, contrary to the conspiracy theories of the Republican government, aimed to secure improved working conditions, wage rises, union recognition and defence against joblessness, and not the overthrow of the new régime. Similarly, other union demands, such as for exclusive recognition of the CNT *bolsa de trabajo*, were long-standing ambitions that were not designed to upset the Republic.<sup>73</sup>

The 1931 strike campaign was driven on by the new proletariat in the ghettos on the outskirts of Barcelona like Santa Coloma and La Torrassa in l'Hospitalet and in the *Cases Barates*, where, for the first time, the CNT organised the thousands of unskilled immigrants who had entered the unions in the hope that their wretched material situation could be altered through collective syndical mobilisation. These peripheral working class

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<sup>73</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 13 January, 26 March, 13 August 1931; Las Noticias, 11 December 1931; Trabajo, 15, 30 June, 31 July 1931. The opinion of British Consul-General King after a strike was averted in energy sector is most telling: 'as there is no doubt that there is still a good deal of underpaid labour in Barcelona, the companies may congratulate themselves on having got off so easily' (FO371/15774/W8199/46/41: Report of Consul-General King, 8 July 1931 (PRO))

districts were seething and on a propaganda visit to the proletarian outskirts of the city in May García Oliver praised the 'barbarous' atmosphere reigning among the immigrant proletariat.<sup>74</sup> It was this groundswell of activity that lay the basis for the meteoric revival of the CNT between 1930-1931 and the series of mobilisations that followed. During these strikes, the CNT grew in numbers, drawing in hundreds of thousands of workers who saw the Confederation as the best vehicle to pursue their day-to-day material aspirations, underlining the extent to which membership was always conditional on the ability of the unions to fight, and sometimes win, against the bourgeoisie.<sup>75</sup>

The open, decentralised nature of the CNT provides a further explanation for the eruption of strikes in the days of hope after the birth of the Republic. The climate of branch union meetings was one of ebullience following the recent victory over the monarchy. Sentiments that the time was ripe for change electrified assemblies and shop stewards were keen not just to recapture past economic positions but, in a more general sense, regain the collective dignity of the proletariat and recuperate the revolutionary reputation of the CNT. This makes sense of demands for the re-employment of victimised workers during the epic strike at La Canadença in 1919 and the 1917 railwaymen's strike. Many strikes took place through the CNT but not necessarily under the direct control of the union, as many shop stewards were either simply unprepared or unable to neutralise such a groundswell in favour of action. The Confederal masses were also aroused by the traditions of material, moral and physical solidarity among the CNT unions. This stimulated an avalanche of industrial conflicts. However, the tendency to push demands without full consultation with other unions meant that a number of strikes were so hurriedly launched that they lacking in basic preparation and carried few real

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<sup>74</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 2 September 1930, 18 April, 24 May, 14 June, 1, 2, 16, 28 September 1931

<sup>75</sup> This axiom clashes directly with the claim of Antonio Bar that the CNT was strongest when the intervention of anarchists was greatest: 'The CNT: the Glory and Tragedy of Spanish Anarchosyndicalism', in Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds.), Revolutionary Syndicalism. An International Perspective, Aldershot, 1990, pp.119-138. The extent to which the union rank-and-file accepted the ideological baggage of the anarcho-syndicalist, anarchist or communist factions within the Confederation is debatable and union support was often based on the wider realities like the balance of social and political forces. Indeed, in moments when the CNT was in crisis, particularly during times of state repression, the loyalty of the Catalan masses to the Confederation could be very weak.

chances of success. Nevertheless, when the dispute arrived at a position of stalemate, the striking union executive looked to the Barcelona Local Federation for assistance and appealed for Confederal solidarity and financial support from other union sections.<sup>76</sup>

The unrelenting wave of strikes increasingly irritated the anarcho-syndicalist union leadership which, since the relegalisation of the CNT in 1930, had been concerned at the growing number of industrial conflicts. While the long-term aims of many of those inside the CNT went well beyond the bourgeois Republic and although there were definite limits to the sacrifices the rank-and-file were prepared to make for the new régime, the CNT leadership was ready to allow a brief period of coexistence with the Republic, during which the unions were to be re-organised before the next stage on the road to ultimate social liberation.

The prioritisation by the CNT leadership of practical trade union organisation over their ultimate revolutionary objectives pushed them towards a reformist praxis. This was evident from their warnings that excessive strikes might sap proletarian energies and endanger future revolutionary developments. Similar organisational concerns were reflected in the fears of the moderate leadership that the failure in strike actions would produce a wave of disenchantment across the union base and lead membership to pave away. This was matched with disquiet that those who remained in the CNT would be radicalised by the failure of ill-prepared strikes, thereby making a clash with the Republic inevitable.

These worries grew in the summer of 1931, when the moderate leadership attacked a series of strikes that it regarded as an abuse of CNT federalism and solidarity. While the CNT leadership accepted that the rank-and-file had many legitimate grievances, Solidaridad Obrera implored unions to consider the interests of the entire organisation before entering into a dispute. The moderates hoped to regulate the flow of conflicts, even hinting at the desirability of a kind of 'stacking system' for starting industrial conflicts, whereby those unions with the most disadvantaged members would

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<sup>76</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 8 July 1931; Trabajo, 15 June 1931; La Vanguardia, 13, 30 August 1931

be allowed to begin strike action first, during which time other unions would be required to provide financial solidarity. Solidaridad Obrera also took issue with those shop stewards who it believed initiated conflicts unnecessarily. In an attempt to restrain the militancy of the union base, the CNT daily appealed for the rank-and-file to ostracise impulsive factory delegates. More propagandistically, the moderates played down the accumulated injustices felt by the proletariat and blamed strikes on the FAI. When possible the moderates intervened to prevent strikes. On one occasion the moderate union leadership even accepted the intervention of the Civil Governor to avert a strike by CNT bakers. The leadership also successfully persuaded both the Textile workers and Builders' unions to withdraw their strike committees, thereby forestalling conflicts that would have affected up to 100,000 workers in the Barcelona area.<sup>77</sup>

The struggle of the moderates to stem the tide of rising militancy was a labour of Sisyphus. The emergence of a 'Republic of Order' and the sectarian activities of the UGT, matched with the accumulated expectations of labour and the expansion of the CNT among younger and unskilled workers, all conspired to generate dynamics of radicalisation that very quickly produced a number of protracted union struggles in Barcelona. A pattern of industrial conflict revolving around a cycle of mass strike, boss intransigence, UGT 'scabbing', official repression and a concomitant rise in proletarian militancy, sabotage and picket violence was, therefore, established early on in the Republic. Employer intransigence and state and UGT repression were instrumental in accelerating the formation of the Confederal Defence Committees by *faístas* from the *grupos de acción* and *cenetistas* from the picketing teams. Amid spiralling violence, whether flyposting by night or picketing by day, the pistol became a guarantee of protection for *cenetista* militants from either police or *ugetistas*.

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<sup>77</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 2 November, 13 December 1930, 7, 19, 27-30 May, 9 June, 3, 16, 19 July 1931; La Vanguardia, 4 July, 9-15 August 1931. That the Builders' Union, the only union under the control of the FAI in summer 1931, actually pulled back from the brink of strike action in the summer of 1931 at the behest of the CNT Local Federation, would tend to undermine the claim that the strike wave was the work of the *faístas*.



The increasingly frequent clashes between the Republican security forces and the CNT Defence Committees created a growing distrust for the new police among *cenetistas*. Moreover, as armed clashes with the *Asaltos* became commonplace, the armed anarchist *grupos* came to the fore on the streets. At the end of July two *Asaltos* were left seriously wounded after they attempted to detain a group of militants outside the CNT Textile union offices in the anarchist stronghold of Clot. The same night, when a contingent of *Asaltos* and police attempted to raid what they alleged was a 'clandestine meeting' of the Confederal Defence Committees at the Carrer de Mercaders Builders' Union offices, the security forces were met by a hail of gunfire. This was followed by a four-hour siege, involving hundreds of members of the security forces, that left six workers dead and nearly 50 wounded on both sides. Tellingly, the *grupistas* only agreed to surrender to the army, fearful that the police would apply the *ley de fugas*.<sup>78</sup>

The sharpening tempo of violence turned the balance away from the moderates who, although they accepted the limited use of sabotage and aggressive picketing, relied most of all on a mixture of syndical muscle and negotiation. By contrast, the upsurge in conflictivity created a climate that allowed the radical anarchists to deploy their own violence which, they believed, would frighten the bourgeoisie into submission. An example of the tactics of the anarchist radicals was seen at the end of July, when an armed group arrived at the main telephone exchange on Passeig de Gràcia, in the bourgeois heart of the city, and laid a huge explosive device. Rather than cowing the enemies of the Telefónica strike into submission, the violence of the anarchist radical presented the authorities with a pretext to launch an all-out assault on the CNT, much to the chagrin of the anarcho-syndicalist moderates. Even though it was highly unlikely that the union executive had any knowledge of the Passeig de Gràcia attack, an order for the arrest of the strike committee was issued, all union meetings were banned and the union leadership was forced into clandestinity, from where the strike was lost.<sup>79</sup> Rather than advance the cause of the strikers, therefore, such bomb attacks served only to lose

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<sup>78</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 25 July 1931; Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.2, pp.58-60

<sup>79</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 23-25, 30 July, 13 August 1931

strikes. Yet defeat also bolstered the position of the *faistas* within the CNT, as it was the radical anarchists who were best placed to tap the frustration of the growing numbers of workers who felt defrauded by the 'Republic of Order'.

Although many industrial workers in Barcelona took advantage of the first months of the Republic to attain much-needed improvements in their working conditions, the overall trend was towards disappointment at the way the authorities seemed to be protecting employers. For example, the month long strike of 42,000 Barcelona metal workers ended at the end of August after the authorities brokered a deal whereby employers accepted most union demands, including an end to piece-work, wage rises and the establishment of an unemployment subsidy. However, as soon as the CNT returned to work the Republican authorities turned a blind eye as employers held back their contributions to the unemployment fund and eventually wrecked the settlement. The Telefónica strike was another huge failure for CNT and when the management threatened mass redundancies, many *cenetistas* joined the UGT. As summer turned to autumn, these defeats radicalised many union members, especially the branch activists, the true backbone of the Confederal organisation, who ran the CNT on a daily basis, organising meetings and collecting contributions. Highly concerned with working conditions, these base militants rarely spoke in public, yet they were most active in formulating working class demands and they were highly respected in the workplace. Disappointed that the Republican change was not the magical panacea for the ills facing the proletariat, it was this section of the Barcelona CNT that was most radicalised by the experience of the summer strikes and the continuation of the 'wages of misery that impede us from satisfying the most elementary necessities'. These criticisms soon gave way to talk in favour of destroying capitalism, along with 'this lamentable Republic'.<sup>80</sup>

The most revolutionary elements within the FAI sought to tap these frustrations and blame the strike defeats squarely on the Republic. In keeping with the libertarian orthodoxy that the constituted power is always an anti-proletarian force and the

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<sup>80</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 13 August 1931

protector of the privileged classes, the anarchists cited the repression of CNT strikes and the talk of a 'Republic of Order' as evidence that the Republic and the monarchy were 'the same dogs with different collars'. The anarchists were confident that the working class would not tolerate this for long and that the consolidation of the Republic would be impeded. García Oliver and the 'anarcho-Bolsheviks' proclaimed that the Barcelona proletariat would be at the forefront of a new revolution that would bring the shaky edifice of the Republic tumbling down. In fact, the spontaneous strike-wave and the signs of mass impatience at the tempo of change provided evidence for 'Nosotros' that the masses had already partially overcome their 'complex of fear' towards the security forces and that a simple spark would incite a huge revolutionary conflagration in Spain.<sup>81</sup>

The revolutionary optimism of the anarchists was in large part shared by the dissident communist Bloc and although the level of mobilisation of the Barcelona proletariat was not replicated elsewhere in the Spanish state, La Batalla told workers they were 'on the eve of an immense revolutionary convulsion'. Like the radical anarchists, the BOC was adamant that the new régime had to be superseded by the revolutionary working class. However, the dissident communists were shorn of the apolitical illusions of the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists and they were not surprised by the clash between the middle class Republicans and their erstwhile working class allies. As the OSR explained, 'the Republican government can never be on the side of the workers, nor on neutral ground. It is a bourgeois government and it has to forcefully defend the bourgeoisie against the proletariat'. Consequently, the communist-syndicalists claimed that in the face of the generalised syndical offensive, 'the central Republican authorities' and the 'social-fascists' of the 'counter-revolutionary' UGT 'have embarked on an open offensive against our union organisation, the CNT'.<sup>82</sup>

Even though they were growing in influence, the FAI and the BOC still did not represent majority positions within the CNT. Equally, although the class collaborationist stance of the UGT had heightened grass-roots hostility within the Confederation towards

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<sup>81</sup> Martín, Recuerdos, p.26; García Oliver, El eco, p.123; Tierra y Libertad, 4 July, 1 August 1931

<sup>82</sup> La Batalla, 23 July, 14 May 1931; L'Hora, 25 July 1931

the socialists, the standing of the new régime was not totally damaged and there was no discernible swing against the Republic. Instead, the bulk of the criticisms from the moderate CNT leadership about the repressive turn of events and the 'legal violence' of the Jurados focused on specific personalities inside the Republican government, especially Maura and Largo Caballero, both of whom were despised as 'lackeys of US imperialism' and the Catalan bourgeoisie. Maura became known in CNT circles as 'Maura of the 108 deaths', referring to the number of fatalities during his term as Interior Minister, or 'the son of Maura' (*el hijo de Maura*), a reminder of the bloody legacy of his father and a play-on-words that inferred the minister was of uncertain parentage. In June the CNT began a campaign to remove Maura and Largo Caballero from government, an initiative that was premised on the reformist assumption that if the two offending ministers were replaced, the CNT could co-exist happily with the new authorities. Solidaridad Obrera even issued a call for Maura to be tried under Republican law as a monarchist provocateur. Although the CNT press issued condemnations of 'Republican fascism', this was not seen as an institutional problem but merely something inherent to the repressive personal qualities of the two ministers and their 'anti-anarchist psychological make-up'. This highly subjective view was also shared by some anarchists, as well as the Prisoners' Support Committee, who was always highly sensitive to the effects of state repression. Curiously, despite its growing responsibilities, the Prisoners' Support Committee refused to blame the bourgeois Republic for the repression, singling out instead 'a few men who, from authority and the security services have declared a war to the death' against the CNT.<sup>83</sup>

A dialectic had, nevertheless, emerged: as the Republic became more repressive, the CNT revealed its growing frustration with the limited nature of change brought by the Republic and more readily adopted a position of hostility towards the new authorities. Largo Caballero and the Republican government were warned that by attacking the CNT they were 'playing with fire and it is possible that this fire will

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<sup>83</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 28 April, 19 June, 3, 5, 10, 23-29 July, 20 August, 2 September 1931; Abad de Santillán, Contribución, vol.3, pp.23-24; El Luchador, 31 July 1931

consume your plans'. Similarly, the branch union from the Telefónica, radicalised by its stoppage, issued an apocalyptic threat of the 'general revolutionary strike throughout Spain' if the government did not refrain from aiding ITT. On another occasion, Solidaridad Obrera announced that 'a Republic administered by executioners and assassins cannot interest anybody, even less so the workers...Today, like yesterday, the reins of power continue to be held by the bourgeoisie'. The CNT was vehement that there be any peace with a Republic 'sold to the plutocracy'. Meanwhile, the union leadership had an attitude of *après nous le deluge* and the anarcho-syndicalists warned the Republican government that if it made life difficult for the existing leadership, they would end up facing a more hardened revolutionary CNT leadership. However, the attacks of the moderates on the government are best seen as attempts to placate their radical critics in the unions of the CNT, rather than as a declaration of an insurrectionary intent to replace the Republic with a revolutionary order. Certainly, the Confederal leadership maintained its expectant 'wait-and-see' attitude towards the Republic and openly expressed its conviction that the CNT would get a better deal when the Generalitat assumed control of law-and-order.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 11 June, 2-3, 23, 29 July, 21 August 1931; La Vanguardia, 17 July 1931; La Batalla, 11 June 1931; El Luchador, 24 July 1931

## **Chapter 4: The Battle for the Streets**

### **4.1. Autonomous Catalonia**

When Macià accepted de los Ríos's proposal to replace the Catalan Republic of April 14 with the Generalitat the political initiative passed back to Madrid. The ruling Republican-Socialist coalition in Madrid entrusted the Esquerra with the task of drawing up an Autonomy Statute, a bill for Catalan home rule. Only after the Autonomy Statute had been accepted by the Catalan people would the Madrid Cortes consider the issue of Catalan self-government. The Esquerra was, therefore, in an ambiguous position: it had won a massive electoral mandate in the April municipal elections but, until Madrid devolved power to Barcelona the party lacked any real authority or institutional channels through which it could develop its policies. The Esquerra was seen to be in power but, in fact, it was largely a spectator, unable to enact the reforms it had promised before April, the very progressive policies that it hoped would galvanise the coalition of forces that had greeted the coming of the Republic. Moreover, as the growing rivalry between the Catalan CNT and the Madrid government threatened to poison social and political relations in Barcelona and weaken the Republic, the ERC became increasingly frustrated at its inability to determine the course of events.

The Esquerra faced two major political tests in the summer of 1931: the first parliamentary elections to the Madrid parliament at the end of June, followed by the plebiscite on the Catalan Autonomy Statute in early August. These two votes generated an electoral climate in Barcelona throughout the summer months. In the run-up to both votes, the hallmark of ERC electoral propaganda was the evocation of the same mass expectations that characterised the April municipal elections. In June, the Esquerra frequently described its electoral programme and its pact with the reformist USC as 'revolutionary'. Even the electoral process was deemed 'revolutionary'. In similar vein, despite his advanced years, Macià declared himself to be 'a child of the revolution'. This rhetoric was typically confused, however, and the party eclectically mixed its historical models and metaphors. At one electoral rally Companys promised a kind of socialist transformation, declaring himself in favour of 'the nationalisation of the big factories'. Two days later Lluhí i Vallescà cast his vision back a few centuries to the great

bourgeois upheavals, drawing parallels between the plans of the ERC and the English, French and American Revolutions. Meanwhile, in the prelude to the plebiscite on the Autonomy Statute, the ERC promised that their future labour legislation would be the most progressive in the world, superior to that of both Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Like the electoral propaganda of the ERC in April, the June electoral agitation lacked internal consistency and was largely conceived to arouse mass aspirations and draw people to vote for the 'revolutionary aggression' of the Esquerra. To this end, the ERC issued concrete promises of 'union freedoms', the implementation of 'comprehensive workers' insurance' to deal with unemployment, an ill that the party regarded as 'one of the most imposing problems which the Republic has been presented with'. The ERC election campaign was framed within a broad concern for the most humble sectors of Catalan society, including the immigrant proletariat. In a direct overture to the new proletariat, Aiguader i Miró explained that 'we feel for the Catalonia of the oppressed and this is the Catalonia that we want to liberate with all our power...We want to make a free nation and justice for all men, wherever they come from and however they speak'. In similar tones, Macià solemnly pledged that a vote for the ERC would bring 'social justice' and 'total freedom'.<sup>2</sup>

The agitation in favour of the Autonomy Statute was of a similar character. The ERC appealed to the non-Catalan residents through its commitment to 'freedom', 'social justice' and action on 'social questions'. In one intervention Macià emphatically declared his support for the jobless: 'I say to all the workers that while the Generalitat is in our hands, they will have the best guarantees possible for culture and work'. Finally, two days before the vote, the headlines of *L'Opinió* resounded: 'Say "YES!" and the old chains from two centuries will fall. The day after tomorrow Catalonia will be free'. Meanwhile, it was maintained that those who voted against the Statute would commit 'a crime of *lèse patrie*...they are deserters against the cause of freedom [and] traitors to Catalonia and the liberal spirit'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Opinió*, 12-13, 20-27 June, 29 July 1931

<sup>2</sup> *L'Opinió*, 13, 24, 26 June 1931

<sup>3</sup> *L'Opinió*, 25, 31 July, 1 August, 1 September 1931

In an attempt to tap the hostility felt towards Maura and Largo within the CNT the ERC condemned the policies of both ministers, promising to guarantee 'full syndical freedoms' and repeal all the unpopular legislation introduced since April, including Largo's labour laws. Not only did the anti-government rhetoric of the Esquerra serve its short-term electoral purposes, but it was also part of an attempt to channel the frustration of the Barcelona CNT during the opening months of the Republic. Certainly, the CNT leadership was highly impressed by these overtures and hoped to use the Generalitat as a counter-balance to the hostile policies of Madrid. Peiró praised Macià's 'high moral authority' and even some anarchists remained under the spell of the President of the Generalitat. Meanwhile, although the CNT neither advocated a vote for the ERC in the June parliamentary elections, nor sanctioned the Autonomy Statute, like in April, Solidaridad Obrera farcically announced the absolute independence of the CNT from all political parties, while advertising the meetings of the petit bourgeois Esquerra and remaining closed to any positive discussion of the proletarian politics of the Bloc.<sup>4</sup>

The continuing dalliance of the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists with the Esquerra is curious, not least because both tendencies thoroughly misunderstood the dynamics of the national question. Indeed, despite their federalist traditions, both the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists vehemently rejected the legitimacy of the national demands of the Galician, Basque and Catalan peoples. Ironically, these national aspirations received greatest sympathy among the supposedly 'centralising' communists, who advocated that the workers' movement should seize control of the fight for national freedom in a twin struggle against the various local bourgeoisies and the central authorities in Madrid.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the libertarians were guided by a Socratean self-image as citizens of the world, within which Barcelona was regarded as a universal, proletarian capital. Meanwhile, *Catalanisme*, in all its variants, was perceived by the

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<sup>4</sup> L'Opinió, 24 June, 29 July, 7-9, 12 August 1931; Josep Termes, Federalismo, anarcosindicalismo y catalanismo, Barcelona, 1977, pp.149-150; Solidaridad Obrera, 31 May, 4-5, 16 June, 3, 28 July 1931; El Luchador, 6 November 1931; La Batalla, 4 July 1931

<sup>5</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 19, 26 April 1931; Miró, Cataluña; Jordi Sabater, Anarquisme i Catalanisme. La CNT i la fet nacional català durant la Guerra Civil, Barcelona, 1986, *passim.*; Ricard de Vargas-Golarons et. al., Anarquisme i alliberament nacional, Barcelona, 1987; José Luis and José Maria Arenillas, Sobre la cuestión nacional en Euskadi, Barcelona, 1981; Miravittles, Ha trait Macià, *passim.*; La Batalla, 16 July 1931



libertarians as an inherently bourgeois and reactionary creed, synonymous with the repression of the proletariat and the division of the international working class brotherhood. The contradictions of this vacuous internationalist philosophy were seen days after the collapse of the monarchy in a CNT manifesto that warned the ERC against separating Catalonia from Spain. Bizarrely reminiscent of the most centralistic proponents of Bourbon autocracy, the CNT threatened to 'place all its forces in the streets', promising that if the Generalitat seceded from the Spanish state 'all the Catalan proletariat will rise up, as a single man and block this', using all its resources, 'from the general strike to armed insurrection'.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its Universalist rhetoric, there is no doubt that the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists allowed their supporters to vote for the ERC in the June elections and in the plebiscite on the Autonomy Statute in August. In the parliamentary elections, the poor result of the BOC and the emphatic victory of the ERC is evidence enough, while one leading Barcelona anarchist later described the vote on the Autonomy Statute as 'the second act of the Republican drama'. This was no exaggeration: from an electoral register of just over 790,000 in Catalonia, the 592,691 votes cast in favour of the Statute amounted to 75% of the entire census. Meanwhile, there were only 3,276 votes cast against, 1,105 spoiled papers and the abstention rate was below 25%. Solidaridad Obrera regarded the plebiscite as 'the will of the people against the oppression of an illiberal government'. Therefore, as well as welcoming the birth of the Republic, the CNT masses also provided Catalonia with its first chance for self-determination in two centuries.<sup>7</sup>

The Esquerra was understandably triumphant after the rapturous endorsement of the Autonomy plebiscite. L'Opinió declared that 'the Catalan Revolution' has begun, because 'today, Catalonia is free...For the first time ever the individuals who represent Barcelona are true representatives of the people'. This was echoed by Macià who told a jubilant crowd from the balcony of the Palau de la Generalitat: 'We are free!' ('Ja som

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<sup>6</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 19, 24 April 1931

<sup>7</sup> Las Noticias, 30 June 1931; L'Opinió, 1 July 1931; La Batalla, 4, 16, 23 July 1931; Sanz, El sindicalismo y la política, p.217; Alba, Cataluña, p.240; Solidaridad Obrera, 2 August 1931; Alba, Els problemes, p.88

lliures!'). More symbolically, Josep Dencàs, a rising figure in the Esquerra, likened the Catalans to the Israelites, moving ineluctably towards their 'promised land'. The triumphal calculations of the Esquerra were anchored in the naïve belief that the Madrid Republican government would ratify the Autonomy Statute immediately. L'Opinió embodied this ingenuous sentiment, declaring that 'this is the time for the will of the people...Now it will be confirmed that the Spanish Republic is liberal and democratic'. Inspired by equally artless expectations, Macià appealed to the central government to legislate the home rule without haste and he set off for Madrid to obtain parliamentary approval for the draft Autonomy Statute. Many Catalans believed they were on the brink of a new age and, convinced that Macià would return from the Spanish capital with the Statute accepted, the homecoming of the President of the Generalitat was that of a conquering hero, and the streets of Barcelona were lined with delirious crowds.<sup>8</sup>

The resounding mandate acquired by the Esquerra from the Catalan and the immigrant masses alike in the three votes between April and August obscured the reality that the party had actually conquered nothing. Given the sluggish gradualism that marked the treatment by the central government of all the pressing issues facing the Spanish state and the masses, any hopes that Madrid would speedily endorse Catalan autonomy were naïve in the extreme. Moreover, the customary legislative languor of the Spanish Republicans was enhanced by the traditional anti-*Catalanisme* of the Madrid political élite. According to the British Embassy in Madrid, the central authorities felt nothing but 'apprehension' at the transferral of powers to Barcelona.<sup>9</sup>

As we have already seen, *españolismo* was particularly rife among the socialists. This was particularly true of Prieto who, according to the testimony of Azaña, proposed the use of force against Macià if he refused to back down over the issue of the Catalan Republic. Although the ERC had acquiesced peacefully in April out of respect for the interests of the new Republic, the PSOE remained highly suspicious of the Catalan

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<sup>8</sup> L'Opinió, 2-15, 25 August, 5 November 1931

<sup>9</sup> FO371/16505/W6393: Letter from Sir G. Grahame, 3 June 1932 (PRO)

Republicans, despite the fact that the Spanish socialists were represented in the Generalitat government by Vidal i Rosell, the Catalan UGT leader.<sup>10</sup>

The PSOE was also motivated by tactical concerns. Their main misgiving was that if powers were devolved from Madrid to Barcelona the ERC might scrap the Jurados in Catalonia as a concession to the CNT. Such a departure would leave the UGT isolated in Catalonia and preclude any possibility of massaging new life into the Catalan UGT. It was this fear that encouraged the PSOE to slow down the passage of the Autonomy Statute in the Cortes. To this end, El Socialista embarked on a campaign against Catalan self-government, asserting that the ERC would bring the 'balkanisation of Spain'. The PSOE also articulated a series of chauvinistic declarations about the 'racial political incapacity' of Catalans. Moreover, despite the pro-Republican, anti-rightist and democratic spirit of the majority of Catalans, El Socialista aroused alarm that the Lliga could win future elections to the Generalitat and that therefore the devolution of powers to Barcelona would create an Achilles Heel for the Republic, allowing the right to use Catalonia as a launch-pad to conquer the Republic. The anti-federalist climate generated by the PSOE was sufficient for the Autonomy Statute to become bogged down in a quagmire of bureaucratic committees, parliamentary filibustering and legislative immobility in the Cortes.<sup>11</sup>

The anti-*Catalanisme* of sections of the Madrid government and the lassitude of the Cortes placed the Esquerra in a highly compromising situation. The fundamental problem for the Esquerra remained that although the party was seen as occupying power and controlling policy, real authority rested in Madrid and the Generalitat was unable to influence the legislative process until the full implementation of the Autonomy Statute. Thus, for all the vague promises of liberation and the portrayal of Catalonia as the *avant-garde* of the new democratic Republic, the ERC had no means by which it could ameliorate the brutal context facing those most in need of assistance.

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<sup>10</sup> Azaña, Obras, vol.4, p.154; González Casanova, Federalismo, pp.302-303. Eventually Vidal i Rosell resigned from the Generalitat because of the conflict between the ERC and the PSOE over the Statute, however, Macià replaced him with Josep Jové Sarroca, another PSOE member, on 20 December 1931: Balcells, Marxismo, p.34

<sup>11</sup> El Socialista, 7, 15, 25-26 July, 2, 4 August, 25 September, 23 October, 6 December 1931; Cruells, Macià, pp.140-141

Since the demise of the Catalan Republic and the resignation of Companys as Civil Governor, the only remaining power base left to the ERC was the network of Councils under the control by the party. However, municipal power was no real solution to the problems facing the ERC. Firstly, most of the Councils had highly limited powers of tax collection. Secondly, the financial resources of most Catalan Councils were in utter disarray after the corruption of the dictatorship. The new municipal administration in Barcelona inherited a financial disaster following the corruption in the run up to the 1929 Exhibition and the years of generalised mismanagement during the 1920s had left a municipal debt roughly equivalent to the national debt of Portugal. The economic situation inside Barcelona Council highlighted the meek reformism of the Esquerra and the party quickly reneged on its earlier promise to write-off the municipal debt after financial institutions warned that such an action constituted an unacceptable confiscation of bank capital. Finally, the impecunious situation of the ERC Councils and the Generalitat worsened in July when the Banc de Catalunya suspended payments due to capital shortages. When the Banc de Reus and the Banc de Tortosa followed suit, the instability of the major Catalan financial institutions was complete. Meanwhile, Prieto, ever suspicious of the ERC and keen to restrict the independence of Catalonia, precipitated the further collapse of the Banc de Catalunya from the Ministry of the Economy by withdrawing its state funding and freezing all loans to both Barcelona Council and the Generalitat, thereby guaranteeing a budget deficit throughout the coming years.<sup>12</sup> The parsimonious attitude of the Madrid government and the hostile attitude of Prieto in the Treasury, debilitated the intended source of funding for the Generalitat public works scheme which, in the words of an admirer of Macià, represented 'a heavy blow' for his populist option.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cèlia Canellas and Rosa Toran, 'Dels regionalistes de la Lliga a la Dictadura de Primo de Rivera', L'Avenc, Barcelona, 1983, 58, pp.42-49; L'Opinió, 8 April, 5-6 June 1931; Jaume Alzina, L'Economia de la Catalunya Autònoma, Barcelona, 1933, p.89; Francesc Cabana, La Banca a Catalunya. Apunts per a una història, Barcelona, 1966, pp.91-160; Joan Sarda and Lluç Beltran, Els problemes de la banca catalana, Barcelona, 1933, *passim*; La Vanguardia, 8 July 1931; Balcells, Crisis, pp.72-76, 91-92; Poblet, Aiguader, p.203

<sup>13</sup> L'Opinió, 13 March 1931; Cruells, Macià, p.131

However, even if the Autonomy Statute had been ratified immediately, its highly moderate terms, which allowed for the incremental devolution of powers from Madrid to Barcelona, meant that for the future the Generalitat would be a toothless institution. For instance, the terms of the Autonomy Statute made the Generalitat responsible for indirect, rather than direct, taxation. According to Balcells, this denied the Generalitat 233 million pesetas yearly. This ensured that the Catalan government would remain in a highly parlous state and, therefore, be incapable of fulfilling the reform package that had hitherto been the dominant theme of ERC propaganda. Under these circumstances, Macià seemed anything but the nationalist superman his supporters believed him to be. Nevertheless, the ERC remained undaunted and L'Opinió reflected that 'faith moves mountains'. The problem was whether this view would be shared by the Catalan and immigrant masses who had invested great hopes in the electoral promises of the Esquerra and the Republicans and who now wanted to see a return on their support.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4.2. 'Las cosas del palacio van despacio': the Unemployed and the Republic**

While the unemployed had placed immense faith in the Republic, drastic measures were still required if their loyalty to the new institutions was to be cemented. With this in mind, one month after the founding of the Republic, the Madrid Republican-Socialist government augmented the existing welfare activities of the Instituto Nacional de Previsión with a new national unemployment fund, the National Unemployment Fund (Caja Nacional contra el Paro Forzoso). However, in keeping with the traditional bureaucratic slumber of the Spanish state, the National Unemployment Fund was largely concerned with the collation of statistics and drafting plans for public works. Moreover, budgetary problems meant that the Nacional Unemployment Fund was never anything more than an indication of the good intent of the Madrid government.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Alba, Cataluña, p.241; Balcells, Historia, p.253; L'Opinió, 15 July, 9, 16, 29 August, 15, 22 September 1931

<sup>15</sup> Soto Carmona, El trabajo, pp.359-360

The weaknesses of central government unemployment policy made it imperative that the ERC deliver on its promises of unemployment relief, particularly its electoral pledges to safeguard 'the right to work' through a programme of public works, if social stability was to be preserved under the Republic. However, as we have already seen, the absence of any institutional powers made this impossible and the failure to fulfil the promises it had contracted to the masses placed the ERC in an invidious situation.

Macià still hoped that unemployment could be minimised if the Madrid government fulfilled an agreement to expand the port. However, the port project was another victim of the anti-*Catalaniste* centralism of Prieto, who restricted the control of the Generalitat over the port development programme. Starved of funds, the public works on the port progressed very slowly, particularly after the *Compañía Transatlántica*, the consortium responsible for the works, went into crisis, typifying the inadequate funding of public works schemes. Indeed, in the view of Balcells, such programmes underwent a 'painful eclipse' during the Republic, as many public works projects promised by the ERC remained on the drawing board. Hence, while Esquerra was impressed by the municipal housing initiatives of the socialist administration in Vienna, there were no funds available for such schemes and the ERC-controlled Barcelona Council continued to rely on the slum clearance of yester-year. Equally, there were no major programmes for sanitising or beautifying the ghettos. Instead, the ERC relied on token gestures, devoting interminable Council meetings to renaming parts of the urban landscape after celebrated figures from the anti-monarchist struggles of the past. Accordingly, the *Can Tunis Cases Barates* were renamed after Ferrer i Guàrdia, the anarchist educationalist executed by the monarchist authorities in 1909, while a street was named after Seguí. However, this did not change much for the poor of the city, who the ERC remained incapable of defending unemployed, as seen when the Council failed in its attempt to prevent significant rises in bus and tram fares in September 1931.<sup>16</sup>

Faced with the hard realities of power, the Generalitat set about establishing bureaucratic bodies in an attempt to channel the aspirations of the unemployed and

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<sup>16</sup> Poblet, *Aiguader*, pp.203-204; Balcells, *Crisis*, p.147; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 May, 23 June, 30 July 1931; *L'Opinió*, 26 June, 10 September, 3, 11 December 1931; *El Matí*, 18 June 1931

forestall an explosion of mass discontent. Therefore, soon after the birth of the Republic the Unemployed Workers' Commission (Comissió Pro-Obrers sense Treball) was formed to liaise between the new Catalan authorities and the unemployed. Headed by Manuel Serra i Moret, the Vice-President of the USC and the Generalitat Economy Minister, the CNT refused to join the Unemployed Workers' Commission on the grounds that it was a semi-governmental body. However, this did not prevent the anarcho-syndicalist leadership from delegating representatives to attend its meetings. Because one of these representatives was none other than Pestaña, then CNT National Secretary, it is clear that the Unemployed Workers' Commission was seen as anything but an irrelevancy by the anarcho-syndicalists.<sup>17</sup>

The Generalitat Unemployed Workers' Commission was never anything more than a cushion between the new régime and the unemployed. From its conception, it was evident that the formulation of constructive anti-unemployment policies did not figure among its priorities and it normally restricted itself to holding 'consultative' meetings with representatives of the Generalitat. The real functions of the Unemployed Workers' Commission were to police the jobless. This was evident from its periodic calls for 'calm' and 'understanding' from the out-of-work, its admonitions against any possible explosion of discontent and its opposition to all attempts by the jobless to pressurise the authorities into action. Instead, in a language noticeably similar to the quietist vernacular used by Republican politicians, the Unemployed Workers' Commission argued that it was necessary to allow the Republic to stabilise itself before the new authorities could set about resolving the issue of unemployment, 'as all the nations of the civilised world have done' (sic!). In the mean time, there was absolutely no scope for any mobilisations or struggles that might clash with Republican legality, 'as this would be thoroughly unjustified given that the ministers of the Republic have promised sweeping measures to deal with the distressing situation in which we find ourselves'. These appeals to caution were matched with forthright condemnations of all the 'excesses' committed by the

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<sup>17</sup> La Nau, 30 April 1931; Las Noticias, 1 May 1931

unemployed and a rejection of 'any disturbance of the peace or the assault on banks or food shops'.<sup>18</sup>

The ERC justified the betrayals of its electoral promises in an ever more conservative discourse. An example of this was the manner in which the unemployment subsidies once advocated by the party were dubbed 'immoral' as they would create 'a new caste' among the unemployed and within the working class. Instead, the ERC proposed the far cheaper option of calling on the jobless to display 'serenity', 'patience' and 'discipline' as this would allow the Republic to consolidate its rule and pass the Autonomy Statute, whereafter the Generalitat would promulgate the necessary legal channels to attend to the legitimate aspirations of the unemployed. The ERC also revealed a new arrogance, downplaying the incidence of unemployment in Barcelona and glibly denying responsibility for a problem that it dismissed as an unfortunate inheritance from the monarchy. Indicative of this trend, Serra i Moret, the head of the Unemployed Workers' Commission, told journalists that 'unemployment is not such a big problem'.<sup>19</sup>

The jobless felt differently. Because of the great expectations aroused by the Esquerra among the masses, the unemployed petitioned the 'true representatives of the people' in the belief that the Republican authorities would respond favourably. In l'Hospitalet a meeting of over 600 jobless *cenetistas* attacked the 'intransigence' of landlords and shopkeepers who 'will leave us to die of hunger and cold' and placed its 'trust in the leftism of the Council to satisfy our just demands', which included an 'immediate lowering of rents', an end of evictions of the unemployed and defence of 'our inviolable right to work'. In Barcelona, meanwhile, a succession of unemployed workers' delegations visited both the Council and Generalitat, calling for resources to be diverted to create more jobs. These demands were sometimes backed by rallies of the jobless, like the demonstration of unemployed workers who marched on the Generalitat Public Works Office and the Council Chambers in the Plaça de la República the week after the proclamation of the Republic, on April 20. The main demand of the marchers - the 6-hour day in industry - had figured in the ERC electoral platform for the April municipal

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<sup>18</sup> La Nau, 20, 22 April, 2 May 1931; L'Opinió, 16 July 1931, Las Noticias, 3 May 1931

<sup>19</sup> L'Opinió, 21 June, 12 July, 13, 21 August 1931; Las Noticias, 6 June 1931; La Nau, 27 April 1931



elections and consequently, many of the unemployed undoubtedly believed that their requests were far from unreasonable. A delegation from the march went into the Generalitat for talks with Serra i Moret, Macià, Companys and Aiguader i Miró, while the rest of the unemployed waited outside. During the discussions Serra i Moret, the Generalitat Economy Minister, offered 'not only verbal support but real assistance', assuring the unemployed that 'governmental action in the form of a subsidy or unemployment insurance, will undoubtedly be forthcoming'. Meanwhile, Macià issued a decree establishing public works to cut unemployment. These overtures satisfied the delegation and they and the demonstrators withdrew peacefully from the Plaça de la República.<sup>20</sup>

These words were never translated into deeds. The failure of the authorities to deliver on these and other pledges confirmed popular wisdom that change from above was too protracted ('las cosas del palacio van despacio') and that the traditionally slow-moving attitude of the authorities had survived into the Republic. Eleven days after the march on the Plaça de la República, on April 31, the patience of the Barcelona unemployed snapped when a new march of the jobless to the Plaça de la República ended violently. According to Las Noticias, the demonstrators, 'on the whole young people', attacked nearby shops and requisitioned comestibles. When the marchers reached Les Rambles, they entered 'La Boquería', Barcelona's central market, seizing more food. This was followed by a collective shop-lifting spree at a warehouse in the Barri xino.<sup>21</sup>

The riot of the jobless occurred on the eve of the first Republican May Day. Coming just two weeks after the birth of the new régime, the new authorities hoped that May Day would underline the consensus between the Republic and the labour movement. This was reflected in the PSOE and the UGT celebration of May Day as a 'day of peace'. Similarly, in a bid to undermine its exclusively proletarian content, the ERC decreed May Day was 'a day of the people'. All the main trends within the labour

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from the Comisión de Obreros en paro forzoso to l'Hospitalet Council, 22 October 1931 (AHL); La Nau, 20 April 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 21 April 1931

<sup>21</sup> El Diluvio, La Vanguardia and Las Noticias, 1 May 1931; FO371/15772/W5305/46/41: Report from Consul-General King, 5 May 1931 (PRO)

movement planned mobilisations and meetings in Barcelona. Not surprisingly, unemployment and the economic crisis dominated the concerns of the myriad labour organisations and the various panaceas on offer reflected the diverse tactics of the rival factions inside the workers' camp. In tune with their quietist expectancy, at a small UGT rally in Barcelona speakers called for the government 'to adopt effective measures to resolve the crisis of unemployment and growing inflation'.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the efforts of the socialists and the Republican authorities, the rallies and demonstrations organised by the working class organisations in industrial cities like Barcelona and l'Hospitalet revealed the extent to which class identities were coming to the fore, as the proletariat, rather than 'the people', emerged as the major protagonist. In l'Hospitalet the May Day demands of the CNT included a number of measures at which the Republicans had already balked, including the full expropriation of the clergy and the 'disarmament of all the institutions that served the monarchy, such as the police and the Civil Guard'. However, the impact of the recession exerted the greatest influence on the thinking of the revolutionary left and the May Day in Barcelona province emphasised the growing need for constructive action against unemployment. The top demand of the CNT in l'Hospitalet was the implementation of the 6 hour working day. Meanwhile, the Barcelona rally of the BOC, which attracted 12,000 workers, called for radical medicine against the recession, because 'with the Republic or without it, all the problems of the working class remain'.<sup>23</sup>

The epic May Day rally in Barcelona was organised by the CNT at the Palau de Belles Arts, a venue that lay in between the industrial zone of Poblenou and the city centre. Tremendous excitement surrounded a rally that constituted the first open show of support for the Confederation since the early 1920s. In the run up to the rally, the CNT condemned the ERC's definition of May Day as 'a day of the people' as a bastardisation of a key event in the proletarian calendar. Instead, the Confederation raised the slogan

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<sup>22</sup> Las Noticias and La Vanguardia, 3 May 1931

<sup>23</sup> Petition from the CNT to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 1 May 1931 (AHLL); Las Noticias and La Vanguardia, 3 May 1931; Juliá Díaz, Madrid, pp.5-40; Solidaridad Obrera, 1 May 1931; Lluís Ysern Lagarda, El moviment obrer i la República, 1930-1932, Valencia, 1987, pp.56-66; La Batalla, 23 April, 7 May 1931

'The First of May Against Unemployment, Inflation and For a Reduction in Rents'. This platform promised positive action in favour of the unemployed and the unskilled of the city and attracted over 100,000 workers from all over Barcelona and beyond, the largest mass gathering seen in the city since the birth of the Republic.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time as the CNT rally, just 200 metres down the road, alongside the Arc del Triomf, the Barcelona FAI and a number of community and tenants' groups organised their own rally under the slogan of 'The International Holiday of Revolutionary Gymnastics'. Many hundreds of workers on their way to the CNT rally stopped in the street to take in the curious sight of a lorry draped in red-and-black flags, that served as the platform for the anarchist speakers. Both the CNT and the FAI rallies addressed the general need for immediate action in support of the wageless and the low-paid, including a reduction in rents, the readmission of the unemployed into the factories and the confiscation of Church property to finance public works. However, the resolutions of the FAI meeting, as its title suggested, were articulated in revolutionary terms. Moreover, as one of the speakers observed from the lorry, 'I counted no less than 100 comrades who, with pistols in their belts, awaited the opportunity to throw themselves into the practice of "revolutionary gymnastics"'.<sup>25</sup>

The subterfuge of the FAI in convoking a separate meeting deliberately timed to clash with that of the CNT was a clear reflexion of their separate agenda of *trabazón*. That the *faístas* were also *cenetistas* is not enough to explain this machination; the *bloquistas*, a number of whom attended the CNT May Day rally, were also *cenetistas*, but their party respected the independence of the unions and held a separate meeting on the other side of the city on Montjuïc. In the view of a non-FAI libertarian, the May Day counter-rally organised by the *faístas* was the first 'anarchist plot' against the CNT.<sup>26</sup>

The FAI coincided its meeting to end at the same time as the CNT rally. Consequently, tens of thousands of *cenetistas* poured out onto the streets from the CNT rally at the Palau de Belles Arts at precisely the same moment as the organisers of the

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<sup>24</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3 May 1931

<sup>25</sup> *Las Noticias* and *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3 May 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p.140; García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.115-116

<sup>26</sup> Borrás, *España*, p.116

anarchist meeting were leaving to march to the Plaça de la República to submit their demands to the Generalitat. Symbolising the projected osmosis of *trabazón*, the workers from both the CNT and the FAI meetings merged with their banners to produce a colossal demonstration of working class expectancy. The authorities were impassive in the face of this colossal sea of around 150,00 proletarians and although the Civil Guard had earlier been ordered to attack a small demonstration of the PCE, nothing was done to halt the massed ranks of the Barcelona CNT and the demonstration flowed ineluctably and peacefully towards the Plaça de la República.<sup>27</sup> The proletariat, quite literally, had taken the streets of Barcelona and as the front of the demonstration reached Les Rambles, the rearguard of the march was almost half a kilometre away in the Plaça d'Urquinaona.

In what was hardly a vote of confidence in the Barcelona security forces, Macià responded to news that the march was bound for the Generalitat with an order that only the Catalan Mossos d'Esquadra should be in the Plaça de la República to greet the demonstration. Yet the small contingent of Mossos was very quickly outnumbered by the marchers and when the head of the demonstration arrived in the Plaça de la República singing the anarchist anthem, 'Los hijos del pueblo', the whole of Carrer de Ferrán and Les Rambles were occupied by seemingly unending waves of workers. As thousands more demonstrators filed into the Plaça de la República below the citadels of power, what had been an essentially peaceful demonstration was suddenly engulfed in violence.

The violent turn of events remains obscure, although it seems that as the square filled up with proletarians the Mossos d'Esquadra chief in the Plaça de la República lost his nerve and called for police reinforcements. Shortly afterwards a contingent of Guardias de seguridad arrived on the scene, only to find themselves outnumbered in the confined and confused space of the Plaça de la República and unable to relieve the Mossos d'Esquadra inside the Palau de la Generalitat. Minutes later, when a delegation

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<sup>27</sup> The only violent incident reported during the march to the Plaça de la República occurred on Les Rambles when a panic-stricken Guardia de seguridad drew his sword and was disarmed and beaten by marchers.

of *cenetistas* and *faistas* entered the Palau de la Generalitat, the Guardias de seguridad apparently feared that the building was being stormed by marchers. Meanwhile, the frantic activities by the Mossos d'Esquadra to secure the entrance to the Palau de la Generalitat was mistakenly interpreted by demonstrators as an attack on the delegation. In the resulting mêlée the Guardias de seguridad opened fire on the demonstration, sparking off a 45 minute long gun-fight that left a balance of one Guardia de seguridad dead and two wounded, alongside ten wounded workers. The final act of this bloodshed underlined the residual hatred of workers for the police and the violence ended only after the hated Guardias de seguridad were relieved by soldiers, who were welcomed as the 'sons of the people' and therefore trusted not to resort to the *ley de fugas*.<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult to attribute blame for the May Day violence in the Plaça de la República. The FAI certainly exploited the timing of the CNT rally to hi-jack the May Day celebrations. However, although the *faistas* were armed and while they clearly did not shy away from a fight, their spirit of confrontation is not enough to explain the events. Instead, it is most likely that the first shots emanated from the security forces. At this point events became even more confused, because former members of the Sindicatos Libres and rightists who had mingled with the demonstration took advantage of the turmoil to provoke a gunfight. This is borne out by the fact that the majority of those arrested on arms charges were *ex-libreños*, as against a single *faista*.<sup>29</sup>

The May Day violence was, nevertheless, a watershed in Barcelona. While Macià repeated his call for confidence in the Generalitat and the Republic and promised quick action in favour of the unemployed, the ERC became concerned with order and keeping the volatile unemployed off the streets. These growing security fears accentuated the conversion of erstwhile reformists into vehement supporters of law-and-order. This was exemplified by Macià, who mused that 'if the monarchy represented disorder, the Republic must signify order'. Similarly, Companys, who was still Civil Governor on May

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<sup>28</sup> *Las Noticias* and *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3 May 1931

<sup>29</sup> The presence and expertise of armed *faistas* was overstated by García Oliver in his *memoirs*, where he tendentiously gives the impression that omnipresent and well-drilled *faistas* controlled 'all four corners' of the Plaça de la República, a view unconfirmed by other sources: García Oliver, *El eco*, pp115-117; *Solidaridad Obrera*, *Las Noticias* and *La Nau*, 2-5 May 1931; *El Luchador*, 8 May 1931; *Tierra y Libertad*, 8 May 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.138-144

Day, took up this theme on numerous occasions, placing new emphasis on law-and-order and declaring that 'the Republic represents order, not disorder, and to maintain order I will implement strong measures...[and] repress such outrages with absolute determination'. On another occasion, he vowed 'to defend public order come what may', because the Republic signified 'authority'. Nevertheless, according to 'Paco' Madrid, a prominent Republican publicist and secretary to Companys fretted that more police were needed to avoid 'mob rule in the city'. Increasingly, therefore, the ERC placed emphasis on 'social peace' which, it was maintained, was imperative for the peaceful consolidation of the Republic. Equally, Catalan Republicans, like their Madrid counterparts, began to juxtapose 'the negation of authority' with the need for a 'Republic of order' which, it was maintained, was a vital prerequisite for the administration of 'justice' for the unemployed.<sup>30</sup>

Having seen the explosive nature of conflicts stemming from joblessness the Generalitat was driven into action. Firstly, the Catalan government reiterated the importance of its Unemployed Workers' Commission, which increased its attempts to police the unemployed. Secondly, although the impecunity of the Generalitat and Barcelona Council precluded large-scale, long-term public spending commitments, the May Day and the violent demonstration of April 31 revealed the pressing importance of showing some largesse to the jobless. Thus, from early May Barcelona Council began issuing food vouchers from the Comisaria de Beneficència, the Council Welfare Department office on Carrer de l'Hospital in the Barri xino. The voucher system was organised through the Unemployed Workers' Commission, who required all applicants for relief to prove that they had been resident in Barcelona for at least 5 years. Despite its restrictive caveats which discriminated against immigrant workers, the food voucher system was inundated with requests for assistance and quickly proved incapable of responding to the scale of joblessness in Barcelona.

Rather than assuage the wounds of joblessness, the voucher system brought new tensions among the unemployed to the surface. Because there was only one central

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<sup>30</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.136, 138, 143-145, 171-214, 250; *La Nau*, 2 May 1931; *Las Noticias*, 1, 3 May 1931; *El Diluvio*, 30 May 1931; *L'Opinió*, 9, 16 August 1931

distribution point in the whole of the city, large numbers of unemployed workers, sometimes entire families, converged on the narrow Carrer de l'Hospital in the hope of some relief from their poverty. Tension quickly mounted as up to 3,000 unwaged queued outside the Welfare Department. Moreover, many of those unemployed who were excluded from receiving vouchers by the residency limits also turned up. By the end of June, scuffles between the unemployed and police had given way to full-scale rioting. In one such instance, the Welfare Department offices were stormed by the angry jobless who seized a number of vouchers. Meanwhile, when a defiant demonstration set off to the Plaça de la República to complain about police aggression, nearby shopkeepers fearfully closed their shops. Finally, when the marchers attempted to cross Les Rambles they clashed with police, whereupon they split up, entered bars and demanded food under threats of violence.<sup>31</sup>

To reduce the increasingly volatile queues of those attending the Welfare Department office Barcelona Council replaced the voucher system with 'comedors populars', municipal soup kitchens which provided meals for the jobless. Though the Welfare Department office on Carrer de l'Hospital was the main site of the new soup kitchens, serving 1,200 lunch-time meals, other locations were introduced in areas with heavy unemployment, including the Can Tunis *Cases Barates*. ERC politicians periodically visited the soup kitchens, which they argued were 'magnificent', 'a model of cleanliness' providing 'succulent' food to the jobless. In July the Mayor of Barcelona Aiguader i Miró described the fare on offer in the soup kitchens as 'impressive'.<sup>32</sup>

However, the soup kitchens were dogged by controversy, including allegations that the change from food vouchers to meals had been accompanied by considerable municipal graft and that lucrative contracts had been awarded to friendly caterers by closed meetings inside the chambers of Barcelona Council. The most common complaints regarded the quality of the food in the soup kitchens. *Solidaridad Obrera*, many of whose readers had eaten in the soup kitchens, described the food as 'slops'. The quality of the victuals in the soup kitchens was also condemned by the most moderately

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<sup>31</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 19 August 1931; *Las Noticias* and *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 June 1931

<sup>32</sup> *L'Opinió*, 10 July, 13 August 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 10 July 1931

mindful of the jobless. In defence of the cuisine in the soup kitchens, one of the catering contractors, a far from disinterested party, maintained that 'the unemployed couldn't eat better at the restaurant tables of the rich'. This was a highly unfortunate challenge, because many of the unemployed felt they could and the press reported numerous instances of 'eating without paying' ('comer sin pagar') by groups of jobless workers, ranging in size from four to 150. On one occasion, a gang of jobless workers succeeded in demanding food in the Barcelona Ritz.<sup>33</sup>

The soup kitchens failed in much the same way as the food vouchers before them. Disquiet with the soup kitchens underlined the reality that what the unemployed wanted above all else was work, not relief. It was not even the case that the meals provided much assistance, particularly as the unemployed were still burdened with rent, the largest expenditure facing the proletarian family economy. Meanwhile, the insouciance of the authorities towards the unemployed continued to generate new levels of rebellion, the results of which were often both volatile and unforeseen. The strength of these dynamics was seen with the emergence of what La Vanguardia termed 'a spirit of protest' about the quality of meals at the soup kitchens on Carrer de l'Hospital, that led to street-fighting between the unemployed and the *Asaltos*, during which a worker was shot and wounded. This infuriated the unemployed, who set out on a protest march to the Plaça de la República, bearing the bloody shirt of the wounded comrade at the head of their demonstration. However, since May Day, the political tide had turned against the unemployed and subsequent attempts by the jobless to march on the Plaça de la República had met with the violence of the various branches of the security forces. Hence, when the jobless *énragés* reached Les Rambles they were attacked by police, who prevented them from entering Carrer de Ferran. Another attempt at a protest march in the afternoon met with Civil Guard cavalry charges and running street battles that lasted sporadically for several hours.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> La Vanguardia, 5, 28 July, 19 August, 20 September 1931; Poblet, Aiguader, p.202; Solidaridad Obrera, 14 June, 4 July 1931; El Matí, 4 June 1931; Las Noticias, 5, 27 June 1931

<sup>34</sup> La Vanguardia, 9 July 1931; La Nau, 27 May 1931



The violent reconquest of the streets by the security forces and the disdainful attitude of the authorities towards the unemployed showed how the marginalised, unskilled and largely immigrant sectors of the most despairing sectors of the working class were ignored by the Republican transition. The battle of the authorities to impose 'social order' on the streets after May Day meant that clashes between the unemployed and the security forces became commonplace, as the police took to breaking-up the impromptu street demonstrations of the unemployed. Even when the unemployed greeted the victory of the ERC in the June Cortes elections by sitting down on Les Rambles and peacefully blocking the traffic, contingents of *Asaltos* quickly arrived to force the protesters to withdraw. Undeterred, the unemployed regrouped, provoking renewed and bloody clashes with the security forces in the city centre.<sup>35</sup>

The wrath of the jobless was extended towards those social sectors who were least affected by the crisis and in whose interests the unemployed believed the security forces were acting. An example of this was seen at the end of July, when a peaceful march of unemployed workers to the Generalitat in the Plaça de la República was blocked by Civil Guard cavalry. Following a bout of ritual streetfighting, the unemployed withdrew to demand food from a number of nearby hotels. When the hotel owners called for police protection, there were new clashes between the *Asaltos* and the squads of unemployed workers.<sup>36</sup>

Frustration at their lot under the new democratic order shifted the anger of the unemployed squarely towards the new Republican leaders in Barcelona. According to Francesc Madrid, political secretary to the various Barcelona Civil Governors in 1931, even before the security forces began barring the access of the unemployed to the Plaça de la República, marchers already taunted Republican politicians in the surrounding buildings with chants of 'We're hungry! We're unemployed! You eat and we don't! Robbers!' This resentment was exacerbated by revelations of the huge salaries received by Republican politicians for their political and bureaucratic duties, rewards that were

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<sup>35</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 5 July 1931; *Las Noticias*, 21 June 1931

<sup>36</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 15, 28 July 1931

seen by the urban poor as a sign that the new authorities had exploited the transition to engage in self-interested careerism.<sup>37</sup>

### 4.3. Unemployed Self-Help

The jobless responded to their harsh economic circumstances with a series of self-help strategies. Street sellers, characteristic of all unstable and underdeveloped economies, were one such spontaneous response. This street trade, like the rest of the irregular economy in Barcelona, expanded markedly because of the crisis of the 'official' economy. The majority of the growing body of mobile traders was made up of newly unemployed workers who had invested their last few savings in modest merchandise, which they peddled on the streets and around established shopping areas and markets. The life of the street traders was very humble and their commerce served only to make poverty a little more bearable. The street traders were very popular with consumers. This was particularly true with the unskilled and the unemployed in areas like the Barri xino and l'Hospitalet, where the street traders provided a much-needed alternative to over-priced market traders and shopkeepers. Meanwhile, *el mercadet*, a purpose-built trading zone constructed by the street traders near the Barri xino, attracted workers from all over Barcelona. Although they sometimes bought merchandise from the same wholesalers as the shop and market traders, the street traders had no overheads and their prices were lower.<sup>38</sup>

Another measure adopted by the most depressed sections of the urban populace was the non-payment of rent. The first collective opposition to rent payment began at the end of April, in the dockside district of Barceloneta. This action coincided with a growing desire among certain sections of the CNT to assist the unemployed. This was

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<sup>37</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p.145. ERC Cortes *diputados* received 12,000 pesetas yearly, alongside the 18,000 pesetas paid to Generalitat *Consellers*. Not only was it possible to combine official duties with other business interests, but top positions on *quangos*, like the port development committee or the Comité Cotonera, a government-funded supervisory body for the Catalan textile industry, offered additional salaries of between 20,000 and 30,000 pesetas yearly. Meanwhile, the ERC Mayor of Badalona had a salary of 24,000 pesetas salary, nearly 5 times the yearly income of many of the better off workers in the town: Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, p.162; *La Colmena Obrera*, 6 December 1931

<sup>38</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 February 1932, 9 April 1936; *Minutes of l'Hospitalet Council meeting*, 1 June 1933 (AHLL)

especially true of the FAI-led Barcelona Builders' Union which, emblematic of the city's largely unskilled proletariat, was compelled to place unemployment at the centre of syndical strategy because around 15,000 of its members, approximately 40% of its entire supporters, were out of work. Consequently, a so-called Comisión de Defensa Económica (CDE) was created by the builders' union militants in a bid to take the battle of the economically dispossessed to the bourgeoisie. Headed by Parera and Santiago Bilbao, another *faísta* from the Builders' Union, the CDE set about studying working class living costs in Barcelona, including rents and food prices, before launching a campaign to reduce the encumbrance of high rents on low-paid workers and the unemployed.<sup>39</sup>

Testimony to the degree of effervescence among the jobless and proof of how their aspirations asserted themselves spontaneously when they were not given organised expression, a rent strike began in Barceloneta while the CDE was still defining its strategy. As soon as it began, however, the CDE seized on the rent strike as a necessary part of a contingency plan for proletarian survival in the economic crisis. The advice of the CDE to workers was succinct: 'Eat well and, if you don't have the money, then don't pay your rent!' Equally, for those troubled by 'scandalous rents' and 'indecent conditions', the tip was the same: 'Don't pay!' Spurred on by the CDE the rent strike spread like fire throughout the most depressed proletarian districts of Barcelona under the slogan of 'Work for all! Lower the rents!' For thousands of the estimated 40,000 jobless in Barcelona and the further 160,000 living below the poverty line, the rent strike possessed a beautiful simplicity that was irresistible to workers who had nothing to lose. Obviously, the non-payment of rent meant an immediate gain for strikers, representing a significant rise in disposable income for those in low-paid employment without the hardships of an industrial stoppage. Meanwhile, for the unemployed, it was a crucial liberation from the unsustainable burden of rent payments.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16, 18, 25 April, 1, 25 November 1931; COPUB, *Memoria de los trabajos realizados durante el ejercicio de 1931*, Barcelona, 1932, p.440; *Butlletí de l'Institut d'Investigacions Econòmiques*, 13, 1933, p.4

<sup>40</sup> COPUB, *Memoria...de 1931*, p.469; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26, 30 April, 7, 21, 24 June, 18 July, 15 August, 6 November 1931

The rent strike was also bound up with the mass expectations aroused by the ERC before the birth of the Republic, when it had proposed curbs on the unregulated activities of landlords and a new deal for tenants. Meanwhile, after the collapse of the monarchy, radical Republicans in Barcelona continued to endorse price cuts and rent reductions to alleviate 'the crisis of unemployment' and end the 'animal existence' endured by a significant section of the working class. With the ERC duly put in power, many tenants sought to force the pace of change and remind the authorities of the need to act on the housing question.<sup>41</sup>

The organisers of the rent campaign were emphatic that they did not seek to clash with the Republic and they stressed that their aspirations were exclusively economic. Since its creation, the CNT had proposed action on rents and attacked the parasitism of landlords and shopkeepers, just as there were long-standing proletarian traditions of agitation against high prices and the cost of living that dated back to the rampant inflation of World War One and before. The rent strikers also emphasised that they sought neither the economic ruination of the property-owning class nor the revolutionary abolition of landlord-tenant relationships. Instead, the strikers made it clear that their aim was to end the payment of exorbitant rents and that they were prepared to pay rent, but only after a 40% reduction, a figure that the CDE calculated was both 'modest' and would yield a 6-17% financial return to the landlord above the cost of repairs, which, as demonstrated by the dreadful condition of housing stock in proletarian Barcelona, did not amount to much.<sup>42</sup>

The CDE was adamant that words alone would not overcome the intransigence of a landlord class that had become accustomed to having its own way and was unused to any challenge to its authority. It followed, therefore, that the rent strike had to rely on mass mobilisation. The CDE rejected calls from the Republicans that the rent strikers should end their campaign and rely on the authorities to tend to their problems at some unspecified date in the future. In the first instance, official rent arbitration procedures

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<sup>41</sup> L'Opinió, 13, 27 March 1931; La Calle, 15 May, 16 October 1931

<sup>42</sup> Adolfo Bueso, Como fundamos la CNT, Barcelona, 1976, pp.53-54; Solidaridad Obrera, 13 January, 26-28 March, 13 May, 15 August 1931; Tierra y Libertad, 5 September 1931

were highly laboriousness and largely unattractive due to the rise in the cost of living that followed the advent of Republican rule. Moreover, as the CDE pointed out, if the rent strikers ended their campaign and waited passively for change to come from above, they would be effectively disarming themselves in the face of their enemies. Instead, it was implied that immediate action against high rents was required, the very panacea that the Republicans themselves had promised before they took power. This view was echoed by Tierra y Libertad, which opined that because of the slowness of the Republicans to better the situation of 'the people', the rent strike was 'opportune': 'we will do more in a few months than several centuries of legislation'. Meanwhile, in the opinion of Parera, one of the founders of the CDE, the rent strike was strengthened by the conservatism of Republicans politicians who 'ignored the voice and the needs of the people, who have now projected their aspirations into the CDE'.<sup>43</sup>

This was no exaggeration. Throughout the summer of 1931 the CDE consolidated itself through a series of mass meetings. The rent strike grew on a daily basis which, as a non-sectarian initiative, was open to all workers who wished to join, not just those within the CNT. The only demands made by the CDE on new strikers was that they register with the strike committee and thereafter act in absolute solidarity with other strikers. It was the open nature of the rent strike that was of paramount importance as agitation on living standards, as illustrated by the wartime CNT-UGT general strike in favour of an *abaratamiento*, could only really be effective if it drew in workers without restriction of political creed. By the end of July, the CDE claimed that the rent strike spanned 45,000 tenants in Barcelona city alone, predicting that their number would double in August. These triumphant predictions were fulfilled and by late summer there were over 90,000 rent strikers in the Barcelona area. Meanwhile, the action also began to spread beyond the Catalan capital and in September 'significant resistance' to the payment of rents was reported along the coast in Calella to the north and to the south in Vilanova i la Geltrú.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Las Noticias, 3 May 1931; Boletín Oficial del Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión, 23, June 1932, p.595; Solidaridad Obrera, 12 August 1931; Tierra y Libertad, 11 July, 1 August 1931

<sup>44</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 13, 15 May, 5 June, 4, 21 July, 5, 14-15, 26 August 1931; La Vanguardia, 8 July, 24 September 1931; Las Noticias, 26 June 1931

The strength of the rent strike can also be attributed to the high level of community-based solidarity within proletarian districts. Accordingly, when landlords evicted tenants for the non-payment of rent, CDE activists and neighbours were always on hand to reinstate tenants and their furniture. Equally, if families could not be re-installed straight away, there were always offers of beds and temporary accommodation in the community. When the tempo of evictions intensified, so too did the rate of reinstatements, which increasingly assumed the form of community celebrations, drawing in rent strikers from surrounding streets and, at crucial moments, other districts. On occasions, popular feeling was so intensely overwhelming that bailiffs refused to carry out evictions.<sup>45</sup>

Another strength of the rent campaign was that as it spread, it incorporated the specific grievances of tenants of any given district within the overall struggle for a reduction in rents. In the *Cases Barates*, the rent campaign fused with long-standing demands for school provision, health facilities, street lighting and transport links. In Santa Coloma de Gramanet the campaign championed the complete exemption of the unemployed from all rent payments, while in Horta, the rent strikers issued an audacious series of demands, including the removal of the Civil Guard from the district and the immediate closure of the local church. Demands for free travel for the jobless were also advanced by the some of the groups of rent strikers.<sup>46</sup>

During the struggle, the CDE widened its attack to include all those social sectors that it held responsible for the abject condition of the Barcelona proletariat. Denunciations of shopkeepers and market-traders became ever-common in the propaganda of the Comisión. Following a visit to La Boquería, a CDE delegation remarked that because of uncontrolled food prices "'life" is a privilege. The people either do not eat or, at best, eat little and badly'. Days later, at a CDE meeting attended by 1,500 people in the fiery CNT waterfront stronghold of Barceloneta, where the rent strike began, Santiago Bilbao excoriated shopkeepers and landlords for 'robbing' the workers, after parsimonious employers had already 'pilfered' from their wage packets. In

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<sup>45</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 5, 20 May, 15 August 1931

<sup>46</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9, 31 May, 4, 8, 18, July 1931; *Tierra y Libertad*, 8 August 1931

a significant escalation of its campaign, the CDE began publishing names and addresses of shopkeepers who, it alleged, manipulated the price and quality of products of foodstuffs. In the words of one CDE spokesperson, its 'first attack was aimed at the landlords. The second against those employers that provoke the crisis of unemployment of which we are the victims. The third against the shopkeepers and monopolisers of foodstuffs. And the fourth, went to the very heart, against the financial trusts which, more sinister of all, engender the misery, the pain, the ignorance and the slavery of the great proletarian masses from high up...The solution has to emerge from the people and which they have to impose themselves...The authorities have failed and we will now see what we can achieve ourselves'.<sup>47</sup>

Mass unemployed struggles such as those spearheaded by the CDE were just one way in which the poorest sectors of the Barcelona proletariat struggled to survive in the absence of basic social welfare provision. Many refused to accept that joblessness should carry the penalty of hunger and viewed illegality as a legitimate response to their material scarcity. Press coverage of 'crimes against property' revealed an array of different strategies utilised by the unemployed and the low-paid to lessen what was often an unrelenting economic penury. These strategies included a wide span of street activities, ranging from the relatively skilled craft of pickpocketing, across to bicycle thefts, 'stick-ups' and 'muggings'.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, this illegal self-help of the jobless was directed against the middle and upper classes, the very sectors which, as anyone brought up in the proletarian milieu of Barcelona knew only too well, held a massive monopoly of property. Consequently, the 'mugging' of rich pedestrians, especially those upper class women who could not withstand the temptation to advertise their fortune publicly, was commonplace, particularly in zones like Les Rambles, where the middle classes intermingled with the working class. Bourgeois flats were also regularly raided, with gangs sometimes removing furniture and even front doors.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, owing to the

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<sup>47</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 28 June, 3 July, 23 June 1931

<sup>48</sup> Las Noticias, 18 April, 3, 6, 10, 23 May, 5, 13, 17, 26 June, 19 September, 16, 22 December 1931, 7, 25 February 1932; Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 19 June 1936 (AHLL)

buoyant black market in small arms in some of the bars around the Barri xino and the port, pistols were common. Armed individuals targeted the plush suburbs of Alt Barcelona, around Sarrià, Pedralbes and Vallvidrera, the high area of the city, both socially and geographically speaking, for 'stick-ups' and robberies in and around the fashionable weekend homes of the bourgeoisie. These raids were sometimes quite lucrative, especially as in the post-Wall Street world the monied class of Barcelona had a distrust of banks and often kept substantial sums of money at home, although there were also suspicions that the rich exaggerated the money lost in house robberies for insurance purposes.<sup>49</sup>

Highway robbery on the isolated country roads (*carreteras*) that connected Barcelona with neighbouring towns was also very common. Through their isolation and the relative absence of police, these roads were a great attraction to armed robbers who, either alone or in small groups, patiently awaited the sound of an approaching car before emerging gun in hand to block its path. It was unusual for cars to drive on when challenged and, in such cases, a warning shot was often sufficient to persuade the driver to halt. A variation of this tactic was to block the road with a stolen car and simulate a break-down, as this allowed robbers an even greater element of surprise when unsuspecting drivers stopped to help. Like the raids on houses of the rich, the rewards of highway robbery were high: car ownership in the 1930s was the exclusive preserve of the economic oligarchy and the occupants of cars would be relieved of their money, documentation, jewellery and any other valuables. It was not unusual for gangs of highway robbers to stop up to four or five cars in a stint, before melting away undetected back to the city.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the true scale of highway robbery. While the geographical spread of the highway robberies reported in the press indicates that there were numerous groups of individuals committed to this practice in the greater Barcelona area, this was more than likely the tip of the ice-berg because, as *La Vanguardia* noted, fear of 'reprisals' meant that the incidence of highway robbery was heavily under-

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<sup>49</sup> *Las Noticias*, 6 January, 16, 17, 23 May, 25 August, 12 November 1931, 2 February 1932



reported. This was confirmed by the police, who emphasised the complete confidentiality they offered to the victims of highway robbery in the hope that more would come forward. However, the need for confidentiality was also enormous because the quiet outlying roads were popular night-time locations for motorised bourgeois lovers, a number of whom were actively breaking the Seventh Commandment when highway robbers contravened the Ninth.<sup>50</sup>

Higher up the economy of urban illegality were the armed seizures of taxi-drivers' purses. The common practice was to hire a taxi and direct it to a suitably isolated destination, often the very peripheral roads frequented by the highway robbers. *En route*, the economic relation between taxi-driver and customer would be reversed. Equally, the commercial establishments in the city known to have money on the premises provided prime targets for armed robberies, especially shops, tobacconists (*estancos*), bars and jewellers. Meanwhile, for those with even greater nerve, the armed bank couriers who delivered the factory pay-rolls were an immensely attractive target. Finally, most daring of all, and obviously more remunerative, were bank raids, the pinnacle of armed illegality.<sup>51</sup>

Normally, however, the struggle for survival of the unemployed was far more mundane. That said, this struggle adapted itself to the contours of the urban setting of the unemployed and represented a colourful hierarchy of illegality. The jobless initiated numerous collective shoplifting sprees and periodic raids on port stores and warehouses, actions that drew in large groups of unemployed and had a certain degree of planning.<sup>52</sup> More common still were the 'smash-and-grab' raids launched by those who required basic foodstuffs. Typifying the desperation of the urban poor, bread, the fundamental component of proletarian diets, provided the main objective of many thefts in which jobless workers entered bakeries and demanded loaves. When necessary, these threats

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<sup>50</sup> Las Noticias, 7 May, 12, 19 June, 9 October, 20 November, 16, 18 December 1931; L'Opinió, 19 November 1931; La Vanguardia, 6, 10, 13 March, 7 April 1932; Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 2 April 1933 (AHLL)

<sup>51</sup> Las Noticias, 11, 20 January, 1 February, 1, 31 March, 9, 11 April, 8 May, 16, 19, 25 June, 1, 24, 29-30 October, 3-4, 6, 20, 27 November, 1, 19-20, 23-24, 30 December 1931, 8 January 1932; La Vanguardia, 25 July, 1, 4-5, 28 August, 1 September 1931, 6 March 1932; L'Opinió, 16 June, 30 August, 24 July 1931

<sup>52</sup> Las Noticias, 30 April, 5 November, 8 December 1931; La Vanguardia, 11 September 1931

were backed up with the threat and practise of violence. Another technique was for a lone woman to enter a shop and order a substantial amount of provisions. When the groceries were packed, 'persons unknown' would enter the shop and convince the shopkeeper that it was both unwise and unreasonable to prevent the unemployed from taking food that they needed to survive but yet, through no fault of their own, could not afford to purchase.<sup>53</sup> Groups of unemployed workers also frequently toured hotels and bars demanding food from the kitchens. For those who wished to avoid tasks of food preparation or, who lacked the means to do so because they were homeless, there remained the option of 'eating without paying' in restaurants, whereby small groups of unemployed ate in bars and restaurants before excusing themselves from paying by virtue of their jobless condition and what they asserted was their 'social right' to life. Three unemployed men applied this same principle on a hedonistic level, spending a night in a El Paral.lel cabaret, before leaving in the early hours of the morning without paying their bill of 375 pesetas.<sup>54</sup>

The predominantly immigrant unemployed in the ghettos provided some of the most desperate acts of illegality. Although the plight of the jobless in the ghettos was dire, it was partially offset by the proximity of farming land and small allotments. Throughout the Republican years arable land in depressed, urban areas like l'Hospitalet and Santa Coloma was scoured for foodstuffs by the jobless. While these forays onto the land often yielded little more than a few vegetables or a handful of artichokes, when lucky, the unemployed made off with a chicken for a rare and usually unattainable meat supper. According to the Sociedad de Patronos Cultivadores in l'Hospitalet, an important local agrarian pressure group, by the end of 1931 the groups of unemployed who 'attack our fields and take away everything they can carry' were so active that landowners were forced to guard crops 'at all hours, day and night'. At times, the audacity of the jobless was matched by their imagination. In l'Esplugues, just down the road from l'Hospitalet, an unemployed car mechanic was arrested *in flagrante delicto*

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<sup>53</sup> Las Noticias, 1 October, 4, 8, 27 November, 26 December 1931, 4 February and 3 May 1932; Communiqués from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 13 May, 19, 21 June 1933 (AHLL)

<sup>54</sup> La Vanguardia, 21 August 1931, 29 July 1932; Las Noticias, 4 April, 18 May, 5 June 1931, 8 January 1932; El Matí, 6 June 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 25 July 1931

stripping parts from a luxury car. On another occasion a pair of unemployed workers was arrested stealing light-bulbs from street lamps. Meanwhile, in a climate of privation, religiosity was a luxury that the unemployed of l'Hospitalet could ill afford and running the risk of eternal damnation, jobless workers periodically lifted collection boxes from churches. Thus, while the residual anti-clericalism among the proletariat dissuaded many unemployed workers from accepting Catholic charity, by the same token, atheistic sentiments legitimated the robbery of valuable gold icons from churches, a practice that was very common in the 1930s.<sup>55</sup>

Although a powerful array of factors militated against intra-working class crime, there were, nevertheless, a few cases in which proletarians were the objects of illegality. One unfortunate pickpocket (*ratero*) who infiltrated the CNT May Day demonstration in search of wallets and watches was discovered and beaten by indignant marchers before the police managed to protect the felon from the wrath of the crowd. In such cases, Solidaridad Obrera encouraged workers to take direct measures of self defence and when a worker was robbed at gun-point of his wages the CNT daily counselled that 'it is necessary for us workers to arm ourselves, to prevent them [i.e. criminals] from robbing us of the fruit of the sweat of our brows'.<sup>56</sup>

Despite a generalised sympathy for the underdog within proletarian Barcelona, before the onset of the recession many workers felt a certain ambivalence towards recidivists. This view was bound up with the well-known connexions between right-wing gunmen and convicts from at least World War One, the legacy of which was an association between illegality and anti-proletarian behaviour. By contrast, the popular self-image held by many workers was that of the honourable wage-earner living exclusively from labour. This perception accorded with the perspectives of the moderate CNT leadership, whose view of proletarian morality was, in essence, little more than a radical version of the bourgeois conception of the 'good worker'. Accordingly, the

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<sup>55</sup> La Vanguardia, 4 March 1932; Las Noticias, 20 May, 5 December 1931, 24 February 1932; Letters from La Sociedad de Patronos Cultivadores to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 30 October, 12 November 1931 (AHLL); Communiques from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 5 October, 6, 7, 13, 20 November 1932, 12 May 1933, 4, 12, 15, 19, 22, 28 June, 10 July, 4 August, 25 September 1934, 11 March, 21 May, 21 June, 6 July 1936 (AHLL)

<sup>56</sup> Las Noticias, 2-3 May 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 16 June 1931

anarcho-syndicalists accepted the right of workers to break the law in a strike by beating up 'scabs' but regarded other illegality, such as 'crime', as being inappropriate to 'disciplined' and 'honourable' workers. In the first half of 1931, when Solidaridad Obrera reflected the editorial line of the anarcho-syndicalists, the CNT daily often echoed official perspectives on illegality, attributing what it described as 'criminal robberies' to the work of 'malefactors'. Similarly, while thousands of *cenetistas* lived in and around the Barri xino, and even though the offices of the CNT Catalan and National Committees and many Barcelona CNT unions were located in the area, the anarcho-syndicalists shared some of the same reservations as bourgeois ideologues towards Barcelona's most denigrated district. Indicative of the suspicion felt by the anarcho-syndicalists towards the Barri xino, Solidaridad Obrera provided a sensationalist description of the area that would not have been out of place in the bourgeois press, describing the poorest quarters of proletarian Barcelona as a place of 'degeneration' and 'moral crime', full of bars and cabarets where 'the poor whore, the shameless pimp, the drunkard, the crook and the lout are the owners of the streets'.<sup>57</sup>

From 1931 onwards the moral code of the anarcho-syndicalists was placed under real stress, as the ravages of joblessness prompted the expansion of illegal modes of behaviour. This was reflected in a growing gulf between the union leadership and sections of the grass-roots, most notably the unemployed, as *cenetistas* engaged in practices that were shunned by the moderate anarcho-syndicalists.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 14 January, 13, 19, 26, 30 May, 19, 24 June 1931

<sup>58</sup> La Vanguardia, 1 September 1931; Las Noticias, 21 November 1931

#### 4.4. Criminalising the Unemployed

As we saw earlier, from the beginning of the Republic, bourgeois and middle class pressure groups made it clear to the new authorities that the 'principle of authority' had to be maintained. In the wake of the various manifestations of unemployed self-help, these same groups petitioned the authorities afresh, in a further bid to secure their privileges within a 'Republic of order'.

Shopkeepers and market traders interpreted street trade by the unemployed as a direct threat to their own livelihood and the commercial pressure groups of the urban petit bourgeoisie called for its repression, 'using all means necessary'. One Barcelona traders' association, the Lliga de Defensa d'Industria i Comerç de Sant Martí, warned the Council that the jobless vendors would soon provoke a 'disturbance of the peace' and issued a thinly veiled threat that its members would take the law into their own hands. There were similar demands from traders in the Hostafrancs district, due to the steady increase in trade by unemployed vendors from neighbouring l'Hospitalet. However, it was *el mercadet*, the citadel of street trade, which attracted the wrath of the commercial class, even though it was away from the environs of established markets and, therefore, satisfied the major criticism of street trade, namely that it should not be in direct competition with market stallholders. Nevertheless, the market traders called for the end of *el mercadet*, describing it as 'a disgusting Moroccan bazaar' where unhygienic food was sold to unsuspecting consumers. It was even alleged that *el mercadet* was a centre for crime.<sup>59</sup>

The authorities found it difficult to ignore the voice of the market vendors. Firstly, while the market traders represented relatively small commercial interests, they were organised into cohesive pressure groups that were based on the clearly defined spaces of the local markets and often incorporated all the market vendors in any given locality. This endowed their economic organisations with significant power. Secondly, in response to the perceived threat of the unemployed street traders, the market traders formed new pressure groups, such as the Associació per la Defensa de los Venedors dels

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<sup>59</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 12 August 1931; *El Matí*, 14 June 1931; *L'Opinió*, 7 August 1931 *La Vanguardia*, 13, 18, 23 September 1931; *L'Opinió*, 20 September 1931

Mercats, which served as an umbrella organisation for market traders throughout Barcelona. Thirdly, and most importantly of all, the tax payments of the market traders was an important source of municipal revenue. This allowed the market traders to exert a certain amount of economic pressure over the authorities through their payment and they repeatedly threatened to withdraw their municipal taxes if the unemployed vendors were not repressed.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly crude attempts at blackmail were employed by the landlords of the COPUB, who warned the authorities that if their rent strike was not speedily ended, they would also withdraw taxes. The COPUB expected a high degree of official protection from the Republic, despite both its openly monarchist past and its close relationship with the Italian Embassy, the centre for many anti-Republican conspiracies in Barcelona. Not only did the COPUB offer discrete support for the cultural activities of the Embassy, but it also sent a delegation to the fascist-sponsored 'International Congress of Urban Property' in Rome in 1933.<sup>61</sup>

Despite its visceral anti-Republicanism, the landlords' association felt it opportune to display a new-found Republicanism, even crying crocodile tears that the rent strike might generate 'an unnecessary state of alarm, prejudicial to the consolidation of the Republic'. The landlords also suggested that they placed the future of the new régime above their own narrow financial interests and the COPUB repeatedly couched its opposition to the rent strike on the grounds that the mobilisation was led by 'irresponsible elements' committed 'to compromise the new political institutions by provoking conflicts' and replace the Republic with a Bolshevik dictatorship. In l'Hospitalet the hypocrisy of the COPUB was even more contrived, expounding ludicrously that 'property has made a great and modern city from the fields' of the city, only to see this civilisation endangered by the rent strike, which they alleged was the Spanish episode of the 'organised offensive against world property', similar to that which 'occurred in Russia'. La Vanguardia also joined the fray against the rent strikers and

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<sup>60</sup> Las Noticias, 22 May, 2 October, 17 December 1931; Minutes from l'Hospitalet Council meeting, 28 August 1934 (AHLL); Letter from la Unió de Venedors del Mercat de Collblanc to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 4 September 1935, (AHLL)

<sup>61</sup> COPUB, Memoria de los trabajos realizados durante el ejercicio de 1933, Barcelona 1934, pp.36, 45

denounced the 'violent tone' adopted by Durruti at a CDE meeting in Sants. Meanwhile, the landlords maintained that the rent strike 'harms tenants' interests' and was the 'unfounded' work of 'agitators' out to rupture the 'harmony between landlords and tenants', 'impede the implementation of the Republic' and 'damage the national economy with the subsequent moral and material ruin of the entire country'. In contrast to the insurrectionary and irresponsible attitude of the strikers, the landlords professed their 'civic tolerance'. Just as the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional hid from the mobilisations of the CNT behind the legality of the Republican Jurados, so the property-owners urged 'tenants of good faith' to assist 'the triumph of order and social peace' by channelling their grievances through the legal avenues provided by the Republic. Equally, the landlords called on the Madrid government to 'maintain the principle of authority' against rent strikers and impose an 'unyielding' repression of the 'state of insubordination of many thousands of tenants [and the] state of anarchy in Barcelona, especially in the peripheral districts'. Finally, although the CDE was an openly constituted section of the CNT, Pich i Pon, the Radical President of the COPUB, implored the authorities to place it outside the law.<sup>62</sup>

The emergence of the unemployed *en masse* on the streets aroused considerable fear of the unemployed among the economically stable sectors of Barcelona. The appearance of the unemployed vendors was viewed in highly threatening terms by the middle classes as 'plagues' of 'rebel traders' illegally 'invading' the streets and 'bursting forth' like a 'true swarm' around markets. In keeping with this hysterical conservative language, the incursions of the jobless into the fields around l'Hospitalet in search of food were described as 'invasions' and the 'storming' of estates. The overriding message behind this discourse was that the inherently uncontrollable masses had to be repressed. The residents of Les Corts, an area where the ERC enjoyed significant support, called for a drive against the street traders, whom they described as 'vagabonds who infest our district'. The market traders from 'La Boquería' and the shopkeepers from Carrer de l'Hospital echoed these requests for repression and advocated the strengthening of police

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<sup>62</sup> COPUB, *Memoria...de 1931*, Barcelona, 1932, pp.93, 255-267, 440; *Las Noticias*, 1 May, 7 October 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 7, 18-21 July, 16 August 1931

patrols in the Barri xino. Similar demands for repression emanated from the economic élite in neighbouring l'Hospitalet. Alleging that 'the absence of representatives of civil authority' had allowed a 'spirit of disorder' to spread among the unemployed, the main economic élites and their pressure groups in l'Hospitalet blackmailed the Council with the threat of withholding its taxes unless the authorities acceded to its demand that a new Civil Guard barracks be constructed near the proletarian ghettos of Collblanc and La Torrassa. In a further attempt to highlight the need for swift action on 'public security', the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional took the unprecedented step of opening up a fund to buy land on the outskirts of Barcelona for the construction of a new Civil Guard barracks to ensure the 'principle of authority' in the proletarian belt of the city.<sup>63</sup>

Other pressure groups also implored the authorities to curb the illegality of the unemployed. In the autumn of 1931 self-employed taxi drivers staged a general strike and protested to the Civil Governor about both the robberies perpetrated against them and, more generally, the absence of 'law-and-order'. Similarly, the religious community demanded swift action against the so-called 'sacrilegious robberies' of religious icons and collection boxes from churches in working class areas. Private security guards, some of whom were killed and wounded during bank robberies, advocated greater powers to carry arms, a call that was echoed by the Asociación de Vigilantes Particulares Nocturnos de Barcelona, the professional association of the night-watchman employed privately and by the Council to watch over the streets and private property of Barcelona. Meanwhile, aghast at the practices of 'eating without paying', restaurateurs and bar owners told the authorities that they were unprepared to accept the burden of feeding the jobless and reminded the Council that their taxes paid for a police force that they wanted to see repressing the 'excesses' of the unemployed on the streets. Finally,

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<sup>63</sup> La Vanguardia, 9 July, 12 August, 23 September, 29 October, 2 December 1931, 4 March 1932; Las Noticias, 14 May, 5 December 1931; Letters from La Sociedad de Patronos Cultivadores to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 30 October, 12 November 1931 (AHLL); Letter from the Presidents of la COPUB, la Asociación de Propietarios, el Gremio de Ultramarinos y Similares, el Centro Gremial de Carboneros and la Sociedad de Maestros Peluqueros y Barberos to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 30 September 1931 (AHLL); Fomento de Trabajo Nacional, Memoria...1931, p.201



hoteliers, worried at the overseas reputation of the city as a 'den of thieves', called for a comprehensive repression against all law-breakers.<sup>64</sup>

These moral panics were fully assimilated by the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, the most powerful bourgeois pressure group in Barcelona province. The Fomento spearheaded the campaign against 'the absence of the principle of authority' and organised a petition, signed by all major employer and commercial groups in Catalonia, which, though professing the 'loyal adherence to the Republic' of the signatories, made it clear that their future support was conditional on 'the re-establishment of order'. In what amounted to a bourgeois critique of the security situation since the coming of the Republic, the Fomento explained that 'professional villains' and 'the unwashed' (*los desaliñados*) had interpreted the change in régime as a suitable opportunity to launch an 'eruption of certain forms of criminality'. The results of this criminal conspiracy against established society had produced 'the extension of evil', as testified by the multiplication of 'violent acts against the individual and wealth'. In the face of this onslaught, the Fomento reasoned that 'the ordinary resources of the police have proven insufficient and, despite what are at times the heroic efforts of the security forces and the Civil Guard, crimes multiply and, in their near totality, remain unpunished'. Thus 'fearing that tragic days may return for our city with the recrudescence of shameful crimes', the Fomento advocated a war without quarter against the growing criminal rampage and that 'mass of undesirables, living on the margin of the law, for whom crime is a profession'. The Fomento concluded its draconian epistle with a call for the arming of the middle classes, asserting that 'civilisation' could only be saved if the 'men of trust and order' and 'people of moral trustworthiness' were organised in vigilante groups to 'contribute to the punishment of villains' and 'banditry' with the 'immediate and energetic sanctions these acts of vandalism demand...serving as a healthy warning to the criminals so that they may know the penalties to which they are exposed'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Las Noticias*, 20 May, 3, 31 October, 2, 21 November 1931; *La Noche*, 3, 7, 10 November 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 21 August, 13 September 1931, 4 July 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 April, 24 December 1931

<sup>65</sup> Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, *Memoria...1931*, pp.135, 202-206

These same authoritarian panaceas were expressed in the bourgeois press, which showed considerable support for the arming of the 'men of order'. La Vanguardia and La Veu de Catalunya attempted to raise the ardour of the petit bourgeoisie by imploring this 'enduring and suffering class' to 'wake from its lethargy to return the lost equilibrium to society' through 'the union and defensive organisation of the middle class'. The bourgeois press amplified law-and-order concerns, raising the spectre of the illegality of the unemployed on a daily basis and putting pressure on the authorities to provide 'the maximum guarantees for the lives and property of citizens' and maintain 'order' and 'peace'. In a typical exaggeration, La Veu de Catalunya included robberies and other everyday illegal acts under the general heading of 'Terrorism'. Meanwhile, writing as if crime had never existed before the Republic, the impression was conveyed that the departure of the King had stimulated a profound collapse in collective morality, the end of 'respect for the law' and the wanton 'anarchy' of law-breakers. In similar tones, La Vanguardia evoked grim pictures of a sick society burdened with the 'contagion' of the crime-wave, 'a constant threat to the health of the social organism'. Meanwhile, declaring law-and-order to be a question of 'Them and Us', La Vanguardia proclaimed its support for a war against 'all types of malefactors' (*maleantes*) and tirelessly asked the Republican authorities: 'When will the robberies end?' Yet La Vanguardia already had the answer: it advocated a strong state because the criminals 'have to be watched (*vigilados*) and be contained in all their abuses', warning that 'the problem of public order will worsen daily if the new régime does not abandon its timidity' and re-establish 'the principle of authority'. Accordingly, La Vanguardia courted General Sanjurjo, the Commander-in-Chief of the Civil Guard, and commended his planned expansion of 'la Benemérita'.<sup>66</sup>

Given the patterns of illegality prior to the Republic, reactionary allegations that the demise of the monarchy had loosened popular morality were clearly unfounded.<sup>67</sup> Instead, the lamentations of bourgeois pressure groups and the conservative press that a

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<sup>66</sup> La Veu de Catalunya, 15 April, 3, 22 November 1931, 7 January 1932; La Vanguardia, 1, 9, 25 September 1931

<sup>67</sup> See pp.5-9, 20, 24, 34-35 of Chapter 1

crime-free and law-abiding era had ended confirms the opinion of Geoffrey Pearson that ahistorical nostalgia for a mythical stable past is a fixed element in the conservative mind.<sup>68</sup>

Under scrutiny, it seems that the coverage of crime in the bourgeois press was often imagined rather than real and based on righteous editorial indignation, rather than a careful interpretation of events. An example is provided by the fantastic claims of the conservative daily La Nau, which sustained that the crime rate had soared since the fall of the monarchy because 'undesirable elements' and 'criminals' were on the streets, having been freed from the jails in the city on April 14.<sup>69</sup> That the panics of the right-wing press were essentially designed for internal consumption was comically revealed when La Vanguardia was forced into an embarrassing *volte face* after its screeching journalistic sensationalism convinced both the British and Italian governments to advise their subjects not to visit what was being portrayed as a Barcelona devoid of public order. Aware of the damage that it had inadvertently caused economic interests that represented an important source of advertising revenue, La Vanguardia promptly issued a long editorial that affirmed that there was no breakdown of law-and-order in the Catalan capital and that the Republican security forces were in full control of the streets, thereby contradicting the overall thrust of nearly all its coverage of law-and-order since the birth of the Republic.<sup>70</sup>

For all their inconsistencies, fears of popular illegality continued to serve as a useful vehicle for more general concerns about social stability and the threat posed by the masses to private property. The same apprehensions were also linked to a narrow xenophobia that excoriated 'the large number of foreigners who have descended on Barcelona'. It was these 'alien elements' who, respectable opinion believed, were responsible for a 'drastic rise in the criminal population'. In l'Hospitalet the commercial bourgeoisie was particularly disconcerted by the disparity between the immigrant and Catalan inhabitants and referred to 'two classes of citizens' in the city. Although this

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<sup>68</sup> Geoffrey Pearson, Hooligan. A History of Respectable Fears, London, 1992, *passim*.

<sup>69</sup> La Nau, 15 April 1931. In fact, as seen in Chapter 2, pp.43, 45, the so-called 'common' prisoners remained incarcerated after the birth of the Republic.

<sup>70</sup> La Vanguardia, 13, 25 September 1931

division was not, in itself, the cause of alarm, the balance between the 'two classes' was. In the view of the l'Hospitalet economic oligarchy, one side of this divide, 'the lovers of order', was made up almost exclusively of 'those born here, and who, generally living in the centre of the city, never commit any kind of action that may bring the slightest detriment to the city, owing to their love of the area'. However, these 'first class citizens' were an isolated minority alongside the workers of l'Hospitalet, 'the other contingent of the population of over 20,000 inhabitants who have taken root in Collblanc and La Torrassa, who, on the whole, are not natives of the city'. The bourgeoisie concluded that it was necessary to repeal the legal rights of these immigrants and keep them under surveillance as they 'are not real citizens, because, for whatever reason, be it poverty or their natural spirit of disorder (sic!), they are regularly producing situations, confrontations, and illegal and unpatriotic demonstrations'.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, the signs were growing that proletariat of Barcelona Province might prove as ungovernable during the Republic as during the monarchy.

#### 4.5 'The People' Divides

Unemployment increasingly revealed the antagonistic interests of the out-of-work and the shopkeeper. More and more the social fragmentation engendered by unemployment was a direct influence on socio-political developments. By striking out independently to satisfy their own material needs directly, the unemployed clashed with the interests of the commercial class, a part of 'the people' which, in collaboration with the working class, had guaranteed the birth of the Republic. At first, the Esquerra had hoped to arbitrate over the diverse aspirations of the constituent parts of 'the people', however, as the distinct elements in the popular anti-monarchical coalition returned to face one another in the new conditions after April 1931, this situation changed.

The ERC was now forced to define its position. Because the Esquerra was politically linked to many of the social and economic elements who were appalled by the

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<sup>71</sup> Fomento de Trabajo Nacional, *Memoria...1931*, pp.203-204; *Letter from the Presidents of la COPUB, la Asociación de Propietarios, el Gremio de Ultramarinos y Similares, el Centro Gremial de Carboneros and la Sociedad de Maestros Peluqueros y Barberos to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 30 September 1931 (AHLL)

militant practices of some of the jobless, the party could not sit by impassively as a key part of its electoral constituency came under attack. Hence, while the Esquerra continued to enshroud the inequalities within the capitalist city by addressing itself to the 'citizenry', undifferentiated by class, the party increasingly came to favour specific sets of interests within 'the people'.<sup>72</sup>

The ERC leaders had always believed that the consolidation of the Republic required the appeasement of their middle class supporters. It was reasons of political survival, therefore, which made the ERC bend to the winds of the growing law-and-order campaign and clamp down on the unemployed. After all, the market traders were also a source of political support for the Catalan Republicans. Equally, many Esquerra Councillors emanated from a similar commercial milieu. A survey of the ERC-dominated l'Hospitalet Council between the years 1931-1936 reveals that Councillors were heavily drawn from the urban petit bourgeoisie, like Salvador Gil i Gil, the ERC Deputy-Mayor and founder member of Estat Català, an important shopkeeper who, by nature and class inclinations, was predisposed towards the interests of the market traders, just as he was repelled by the spread of street trading.<sup>73</sup>

In general terms, the ERC venerated the values of thrift and industriousness of the small commercial class. L'Opinió idealised 'the shopkeeper who has established his business within certain laws...[and who] pays taxes and his staff'. The 'Lluhíns' even maintained that there was a harmonious relation between the commercial class and consumers, alleging that 'the buyer and the seller complement one another' and that the honest shopkeeper represents 'a real guarantee for the consumer'. By contrast, L'Opinió inveighed against the jobless street traders, reflecting that unlike the virtuous shopkeeper, they 'can pull the wool over our eyes, with quality as with weights'. Lumped together with the 'plague of lottery sellers and accordion players' who, it was alleged, converged on Barcelona, L'Opinió denounced the 'swarm' of 'rebel traders' for the

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<sup>72</sup> L'Opinió, 5 June 1931

<sup>73</sup> Aiguader i Miró, Catalunya, pp.12-14; Correspondència de l'Ajuntament de l'Hospitalet, 1931-1936 and Minutes of l'Hospitalet Council meetings, 1931-1936 (AHLL)

'damage' and 'obvious harm' they caused the middle class. The 'Lluhíns' were emphatic that street trade was an issue for the security forces.<sup>74</sup>

The Republican authorities declared war on the unemployed traders and Barcelona Council passed a series of resolutions prohibiting mobile trade throughout the city. The authorities legitimated this campaign against the street vendors with allegations that unregulated trade represented a danger to 'public health', a line preferable to admitting that their motivation was simply the defence of the sectional interests of a part of their electoral constituency. However, repression was not the answer to unemployed street trade and because the socio-economic plight of the mobile vendors remained, municipal bans on their activities were defied. In turn, this 'negation of authority' convinced the Esquerra that the unemployed vendors were intent on making Barcelona 'an anarchic city'. Consequently, the street vendors were regarded by the authorities as morally lost and became targeted as part of the illegal 'underworld' in Barcelona.<sup>75</sup>

Repression was given a new impetus in August 1931 when Lluís Puig Munner, an ERC Councillor from the Barri xino, created the Brigade for the Repression of Street Trade (Brigada de repressió de la venda ambulant), a 'special security service' which, in conjunction with the Guàrdia Urbana, the council police, was devoted to driving the street vendors from the streets. The strategy of the new municipal police was to seize and cordon off a street favoured by the traders, whereupon they would be lined-up on the pavement and searched, while their merchandise was impounded. On missions into hostile proletarian districts the Council police squads were accompanied by *Asaltos*, providing the pathetic contrast between well-fed, six-foot tall *Asaltos* and the shabbily dressed, hungry-looking street vendors. Meanwhile, in l'Hospitalet, where municipal resources could not afford to fund a police team specifically dedicated to repressing jobless traders, the Council deployed the Civil Guard in areas where street trade was particularly rife. Gil i Gil, the Deputy Mayor in the city, offered warm praise to 'la Benemérita' for its 'actions in the repression of street trading'. Nevertheless, by

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<sup>74</sup> *L'Opinió*, 7 August, 20 September, 19 November, 2 December 1931, 14 January 1932

<sup>75</sup> *La Nau*, 24 April 1931; *El Diluvio*, 16 May 1931; *Las Noticias*, 22 May 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses y un día*, pp. 145, 156-157

November 1931 the scale of the actions against the street vendors were so widespread that in just three days Puig Munner reported that a total of 4,000 kilos of foodstuffs had been confiscated from unlicensed traders in Barcelona alone. While the Council continued to justify the drive against the street traders with references to concerns for public health, these claims were undermined by the decision of the authorities to donate sequestered produce to the kitchens of local hospitals, as well as the reported theft of confiscated food by police and tales of its re-sale to the established market traders.<sup>76</sup>

At the bidding of the market and shop traders, the municipal authorities set themselves on a path of escalating confrontation with the street vendors. Even when the authorities were busy harassing the street traders and making scores of arrests, market traders and the commercial middle class continued to petition the authorities for more repression to end 'the embarrassing spectacle' of unlicensed trade. Similarly, in l'Hospitalet, at a time when the street vendors were reeling from the police measures of the Council, the *Unió de Venedors del Mercat de Collblanc* accused the authorities of being too 'soft' on these 'lawbreakers'.<sup>77</sup>

This insatiable demand of the market traders for repression culminated in the destruction of *el mercadet*, a 'cleansing operation' (*operació de neteja*) in the view of *L'Opinió*, that took place under the watchful gaze of a lorryload of *Asaltos*, a delegation of ERC Councillors, market traders and the embittered street vendors. The same day, *Asaltos* occupied the Plaça de la República to repel any protests by the street traders. Meanwhile, speaking volumes about the petit bourgeois drift of the Republic, a succession of delegations of market traders arrived to congratulate the municipal authorities on removing *el mercadet* 'for the good name and prestige of the city and the businesses of Barcelona'.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 13 August 1931, 3 March 1932; *L'Opinió*, 1 June 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 September 1932; *Communiqués from Guàrdia Urbana to Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 8, 13 September 1934; *Minutes from l'Hospitalet Council meeting*, 10 January 1933, 28 August 1934 (AHLL); *Letter from the Mayor of l'Hospitalet to the commander of the Guardia Civil post*, 7 March 1936 (AHLL); *Las Noticias*, 12 November, 16 December 1931

<sup>77</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 27, 30 August 1931; *Letter from La Unió de Venedors del Mercat de Collblanc to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 4 September 1935 (AHLL)

<sup>78</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 19 September 1931; *L'Opinió*, 20 September 1931; *Las Noticias*, 2, 7 October 1931

The descent of the ERC-controlled municipal authorities into repression was mirrored by the increasingly reactionary stance adopted by the civil authorities. By mid-summer, the heady days of Republican jubilation in April seemed very distant. Esplá, who had replaced Companys as Civil Governor in June, retired in the first week of August, apparently exhausted at the seemingly unrelenting succession of civil, industrial and social conflicts that was increasingly paralysing the Catalan capital.<sup>79</sup> That same week Maura, as was his prerogative as Interior Minister in the central government, appointed Oriol Anguera de Sojo as temporary Civil Governor, pending the selection of a permanent replacement for Esplá.

The appointment of Anguera de Sojo was far from coincidental. The untimely resignation of Esplá brought home to the Madrid authorities the need to cap the rising levels of social mobilisation in the Catalan capital. Anguera de Sojo was regarded as the ideal man for this task. Although a member of the Partit Catalanista Republicà, Anguera de Sojo was a right-wing lawyer who had been appointed President of the Barcelona Law Courts after the birth of the Republic. Anguera de Sojo represented the extreme right-wing of Catalan Republicanism: he was a pious catholic and a highly reactionary figure, who aroused suspicions in the labour movement that he had 'escaped from an altar during the Inquisition'.<sup>80</sup>

The accession of Anguera de Sojo to the Civil Governorship, the third person to fill that position since the coming of the Republic, served as a further spur to the growing levels of repression. His arrival in office coincided with a peak in the interest of central government in the Barcelona rent strike. Eternally envious of CNT strength in Catalonia and dismissive of any social struggle that developed outside the structures of the Republican system, Largo Caballero described the rent strike as 'absurd'. Moreover, at the behest of the COPUB, the veteran socialist leader raised the dangers posed by the rent strike to the landlords of Barcelona in a cabinet meeting. In response, the Madrid government made it known that the strikers would be made to 'comply with the law' and ordered the Civil Governor to impose 'the rapid implementation of eviction orders' in

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<sup>79</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p.181

<sup>80</sup> *Adelante*, 2 March 1934



'defence of the national economy'.<sup>81</sup> As a property owner himself, Anguera de Sojo needed little introduction to the challenge presented by the rent strike and his class inclinations could only have been strengthened by his official brief to break the resistance of the rent strikers and reimpose 'calm' on the streets.

It has been suggested that the ERC opposed the repression initiated by Anguera de Sojo.<sup>82</sup> There are a number of problems with this point of view. Firstly, Macià approved the appointment of Anguera de Sojo, who was, after all, a member of the ACR, one of the coalition partners of the ERC in the Generalitat. Secondly, by August, the Esquerra and the Generalitat were highly concerned about the rent strike. The COPUB successfully persuaded the Generalitat to act and Macià told one delegation of landlords that he recognised 'the importance of the interests they represented'. Equally, the ERC was highly suspicious of the CDE, not least because of its public pledge of support for the street traders. Lastly, and perhaps most decisively of all, the rent strikers had established a major stronghold in the Council-run *Cases Barates*, jurisdiction for which rested with the ERC-controlled Patronat de l'Habitació and the Comissariat de Cases Barates. The ERC housing committees also drew connections between the social protest of the rent strikers and lawlessness, damning the 'absolute disorder' of 'provocateurs' whose 'threats and other violent procedures' endanger 'the public peace of our city and social justice'. In response to this 'criminal action', Dencàs advocated the full suppression of the strike and of the CDE. In similar vein, *L'Opinió* regretted the 'coercion' of 'agitators' in the *Cases Barates* which, it noted, had been built for the benefit of 'the most humble classes'. Although the 'Lluhíns' still recognised that the *Cases Barates* were in need of some reform, they sustained that a prerequisite for this was the cessation of the strike and the 'normalisation' of public order.<sup>83</sup>

The coincidence between municipal and civil authorities allowed the repression of the rent strike to gather pace. In 1931 the legal department of the COPUB took up

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<sup>81</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 23 July 1931; COPUB, *Memoria...1931*, pp.263, 479

<sup>82</sup> Enric Ucelay da Cal, *La Catalunya Populista. Imatge, cultura i política en l'etapa republicana (1931-1939)*, Barcelona 1982, p.147

<sup>83</sup> COPUB, *Memoria...de 1931*, p.440; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 August 1931; *Las Noticias*, 14 October 1931; *L'Opinió*, 6 May, 5 November 1931

4,398 legal cases against tenants, nearly 4,000 more than the preceding year. To break the deadlock, the COPUB launched the unprecedented step of running a free eviction service that provided legal advice, lorries and men, to enable its members to remove strikers from their property. The Republican state also steadily increased its attacks on the rent strikers and the CDE. Rather than promulgating radical measures to alleviate the burden of exorbitant rents, the first reform of the tenancy laws during the Republican period was highly beneficial to the landlords, increasing the ease in which 'rebellious tenants' could be evicted. The judiciary joined the chorus against the rent strikers, calling for powers to impound their property after evictions to prevent their reinstatement. At the same time, in its bid to destroy the CDE, the Madrid government blocked any possible negotiation. Under a Civil Governor popularly seen to be acting directly under the orders of the COPUB, the authorities did everything in their power to assist the landlords. Reflecting his legal background, Anguera de Sojo became captivated by the legal minutiae of the organisation of the CDE and he sacrificed the aspirations for change inherent to the rent strike on the altar of Republican legality. Official actions became progressively more arbitrary as sweeping new judicial powers were invoked against strikers. *Asaltos* were deployed in large numbers to supervise evictions and the judiciary provided details of strikers for the blacklist maintained by the COPUB. In a bid to bleed the rent strike dry and demoralise activists, the authorities began slapping petty legal bans on CDE rallies at the eleventh hour, after the costs of renting a venue and publicising the meeting had been met. Finally, informed by his belief that the rent strike was a conspiracy imposed on the majority of tenants by a 'pernicious minority', Anguera de Sojo imposed a full ban on CDE meetings, even though it had committed no punishable offence. When this brought no immediate dividends, the Civil Governor demanded the heads of the CDE and called for a list of the names of all members of the Comisión from the Barcelona CNT Local Federation. Meanwhile, when this threat was left unheeded a heavy fine was placed on the CNT, much to the satisfaction of Azaña,

who fully backed Anguera de Sojo's quest for an 'energetic policy' to make the Republic 'respected' and 'feared'.<sup>84</sup>

Ironically, the spirited defence of 'the principle of authority' was accompanied by the resurrection of illegal practices, including the *quintzenes*, whereby strikers were detained without trial on government order. Bilbao, one of the founders of the CDE, was dragged from his bed and interned without trial after he referred to the rent strike at a CNT meeting. In a further attempt to decapitate the tenants' movement, Anguera de Sojo ordered the internment without trial of other CDE activists, including Durruti, García Oliver, and Parera, the recently appointed secretary of the Catalan CNT Regional Federation.<sup>85</sup>

The COPUB and the judiciary, both of which evidently sought to end the dispute by thoroughly humbling the tenants, continued to call for increased powers to deal with the strike.<sup>86</sup> This repressive goal received a new impetus with the passing of the *Ley de Defensa de la República* in October 1931. This classic law of exception was based on 1922 German Law for the Defence of Democracy and was the legislative negation of the Constitution. Though perceived by its supporters as a defence against violent threats to the régime from both right and left, in practice the *Ley de Defensa de la República* withdrew constitutional rights far more frequently from the 'enemies of the Republic' on the political left. The *Ley de Defensa de la República* also had a preventive thrust which, as Azaña noted, responded not to an actual threat but 'to avoid the birth of that danger'. Despite the far-reaching nature of this law, it was passed without any real parliamentary discussion. From the outset the PSOE deputies de los Ríos and Largo Caballero were firm supporters of the bill, while the support of many less certain socialist Deputies was secured after Azaña guaranteed the party cabinet places in the eventuality of any reshuffle. Meanwhile, the ERC, and especially Macià, who had earlier publicly stated

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<sup>84</sup> COPUB, *Memoria...de 1931*, pp.44, 255-257, 492; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 5 June, 30-31 July, 5, 12, 15 August, 10 October 1931; COPUB, *Memoria de los trabajos realizados durante el ejercicio de 1932*, Barcelona, 1933, p.65; *Las Noticias*, 27 June 1931; *El Día Gráfico*, 13 October 1931; *Juzgado Municipal to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 28 August 1931 (AHLL); Manuel Azaña, *Obras completas. Una política. En el Poder y en la Oposición*, Mexico, 1966, vol.2, pp.273-274, 282-284

<sup>85</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 June, 14, 27 August, 9 September 1931; *Las Noticias*, 11 October 1931; *Tierra y Libertad*, 5 September 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 19, 27 August 1931

<sup>86</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 26 September 1931; COPUB, *Memoria...de 1932*, p.91

their opposition to laws of exception, was brought to heel through threats and promises about the Autonomy Statute. According to his memoirs, Azaña's only regret about the new law was that it had not been decreed earlier by the Provisional Government.<sup>87</sup>

Testimony to the obsession of the authorities with conspiracies, the vague articles of the *Ley de Defensa de la República* proscribed any action likely lead to resistance or disobedience to the law, as well as the illegal possession of arms. It also became an offence to spread news likely to incite a breach of the peace or commit a gesture likely to bring discredit against the institutions of the state. In the trade union sphere, Largo Caballero's labour laws were reinforced by articles that prohibited all strikes which did not give eight days notice to the authorities. The suspension of work without due justification, as well as any industrial stoppage not linked with working conditions, were also outlawed. Finally, the Interior Minister was given new powers to ban meetings and rallies by groups and unions that were either deemed to be anti-Republican or likely to encourage infringements of the law.<sup>88</sup>

Reflecting official concern with the rent strike, the very day after the passing of the *Ley de Defensa de la República*, before the press had even printed its text, the new legal weapon was rolled into battle against the rent strikers. The new law broke the resilience of the rent strikers in many districts. The solidarity that characterised the rent strike now met with internment without trial, while those evicted tenants who dared to reoccupy their flats were interned without trial. In areas where the strike was especially solid, like l'Hospitalet and in the *Cases Barates*, the law was used as a cloak for the wholesale invasion and search of districts by police and *Asaltos*. Meanwhile, the CDE effectively became a proscribed organisation, while its parent, the Builders' Union, was outlawed by the civil authorities who refused to authorise its meetings.<sup>89</sup>

The Esquerra showed new signs that it had swallowed its reformist pride and accepted the repressive line of Madrid. Companys endorsed the 'clear and perfect vision'

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<sup>87</sup> Azaña, *Obras*, vol.2, p.65 and vol.4, pp.93, 185, 260-262; *L'Opinió*, 24 July, 23 October 1931; *La Batalla*, 31 December, 1931, 14 January 1932

<sup>88</sup> M.C. García-Nieto, *La Segunda República. Economía y aparato del estado. 1931-1936*, Madrid, 1974, vol.1, pp.256-257; Ballbé, *Orden público*, pp.323-335

<sup>89</sup> Ballbé, *Orden público*, p.331; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 October, 1, 4, 8, 10 November, 4 December 1931; *Tierra y Libertad*, 22 August 1931; *La Noche*, 13 November 1931

of the campaign of Anguera de Sojo to 'save the Catalan economy from the threat of those who act irresponsibly'. As well as breaking its promise to introduce rent controls, the ERC-controlled Council also contributed to the offensive against the rent strikers, cynically allowing their eviction on the grounds that their flats were uninhabitable, while worse flats remained occupied by non-strikers. Moreover, after a swift increase in the rent and a revision of the contract, flats once deemed 'uninhabitable' suddenly become 'habitable' for suitably pliant tenants. The municipal authorities also turned a blind eye towards the overt intimidation of tenants which, given the trend whereby many landlords collected rents with pistols, often exceeded that of eviction.<sup>90</sup>

The CDE attempted to break the united front between the Republican authorities and the COPUB by revealing the twilight activities of many landlords and their manifest disloyalty to Republican democracy and the state. As well as publicising the monarchist, pro-dictatorial past of the COPUB, the CDE saw beyond the image of respectable middle class propriety cultivated by many landlords to reveal their barely concealed criminality and illicit strategies to cheat the state, such as tax evasion. The CNT press substantiated these exposes with documentary evidence, thereby confirming Rider's view that fraud and corruption were 'standard practice among landlords'.<sup>91</sup> However, despite the janus-faced attitude of landlords towards the Republic, their alliance with the authorities held firm during the rent strike as officialdom remained convinced of the need to repress all 'excesses' in the street.

The rent strike epitomised how the struggles of the unskilled and the unemployed facilitated the emergence of a new repressive consensus in the early months of the Republic. The Generalitat, which was keen to develop the Catalan tourist industry, acquiesced in the demands of hoteliers, bar and restaurant owners for heavier policing to prevent 'excesses' by the unemployed. Similarly, to avoid large formations of the unemployed in the city centre and the accompanying danger of street disorders, the Council introduced extra distribution centres for municipal vouchers, a change which, as

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<sup>90</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 June, 9, 19 August 1931

<sup>91</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 June, 15 August 1931; Rider, 'The practice of direct action', in Goodway (ed.), p.96

L'Opinió recognised, stemmed not out of a desire to make life easier for the unemployed but, as 'it is the most secure method for the state' and avoided large numbers of jobless gathering on the streets. Meanwhile, large numbers of *Guàrdia Urbana* were now stationed around the *Barri xino*, where they were backed up by periodic patrols by the *Asaltos*. It was also noticeable that the authorities were increasingly wary of all manifestations of popular rowdyism, whether drunkenness or pitch invasions at football matches.<sup>92</sup>

Events developed assumed a similar form in neighbouring *l'Hospitalet*, where the local Council received a rude reminder of the growing divergence between the new authorities and those who had taken to the streets to guarantee the Republican take-over in April 1931, when a member of its inner sanctum was robbed and unceremoniously beaten up in working class *Collblanc*. Such incidents could have only enhanced the commitment of the *l'Hospitalet* authorities to augment the existing repressive forces, including the controversial reorganisation of the dreaded *Sometent*, the 'civic guard of capitalism' that the Republicans once vowed to disband. Indicative of the new tough policing in *l'Hospitalet* against the 'dishonest unemployed', a gang of highway robbers on the *Carretera de Cornellà* met with the combined forces of the *Sometent*, the *Mossos d'Esquadra* and the Civil Guard.<sup>93</sup>

Besides the obvious need of the *Esquerra* to calm the security fears of sections of its petit bourgeois electoral constituency, the growing prioritisation of order over justice also reflected anxieties about the passage of the Autonomy Statute in the Madrid Cortes. The ERC feared that any apparent softness in its attitude towards either law-and-order or the CNT might show Madrid that the Generalitat was not responsible enough to take on the onerous tasks of building an autonomous power. Companys frankly admitted that while immediately after the birth of the Republic rhetorical leftism had been a necessary device to prevent the new régime from being 'swept aside by the people', now was the

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<sup>92</sup> L'Opinió, 10, 16 July, 13 August 1931; El Diluvio, 30 May 1931; Las Noticias, 1, 3 May 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 25 September 1931; La Noche, 17 November 1931

<sup>93</sup> L'Opinió, 29 August 1931; La Publicitat, 13 January 1932; Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 10 October 1932 (AHLL); Solidaridad Obrera, 21 September 1932, 6 April 1933; Las Noticias, 8 May 1931

time for nation-building, a new agenda that hinged on replacing 'disorder' and 'the revolution in the street' with 'discipline' and 'order'. These sentiments were reiterated by 'Paco' Madrid, who observed presciently that 'Companys brought order to the revolution; Esplá was the intermediary stage, between the revolutionary gesture and the initiation of the principle of authority of the Republic, to which Anguera de Sojo wanted to give judicial form'.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the initial ambivalence of the economic élites towards the new régime, the defence of 'the principle of authority' and the 'Republic of Order' laid the basis for a new understanding between the Republican authorities and those forces that historically displayed most hostility to democracy. This partial *rapprochement* owed much to the new repressive consensus that developed in the first few months of the Republic around the question of the unemployed. Far more than anyone else, it was Anguera de Sojo who consolidated this consensus and won over important sectors of the business class to the Republic. The Fomento del Trabajo Nacional welcome his 'jealous protection of the law and authority'. Meanwhile, the COPUB showed its gratitude to 'the agents of authority' for repressing its 'rebellious tenants' by making a series of large donations to collections on behalf of members of the Civil Guard and the security forces, as well as establishing a special 'collection' for Anguera de Sojo as a reward for his 'brilliant action during his time as Civil Governor'. The COPUB also expressed its thanks to the central government for enacting the *Ley de Defensa de la República*, which, it believed, had proven so central in the cessation of 'acts of rebellion'.<sup>95</sup>

There were also signs of a new understanding between the Esquerra and some of the old props of the monarchical order. This was reflected in a series of donations to the Generalitat unemployment fund from the officers at the central Barcelona police station on Vía Laietana and from the Asociación de Vigilantes Particulares Nocturnos de Barcelona, the professional association of night-watchman. Meanwhile, General López-Ochoa, the Captain-General of Catalonia, organised similar collections for the

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<sup>94</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.197-198, 266; *L'Opinió*, 26 June, 14 July 1931; *La Batalla*, 24 September 1931

<sup>95</sup> *Las Noticias*, 24 December 1931; COPUB, *Memoria...de 1931*, pp.20, 488, 497-498 and *Memoria...de 1932*, pp.39-40

Generalitat unemployment fund among employers and his fellow officers.<sup>96</sup> Much to the chagrin of the 'Lluhins', Macià endeavoured to win over liberal elements from the Catalan bourgeoisie and from the summer of 1931 the President of the Generalitat began receiving regular delegations from business associations. Increasingly, the advocates of the 'Republic of Order' cemented their relations around the Generalitat in a kind of nascent 'Republican high society' that included sections of the economic oligarchy and their military and police guardians. At a time when the Catalan authorities had severe difficulties finding money to assist the unemployed, this emergent élite was visible at the so-called 'honorary banquets' held in honour of leading Republican dignitaries in Barcelona. An example of these select gatherings was the 'exquisite dinner' organised by Barcelona Council for over 500 guests in honour of the ERC in June 1931, at which Macià, Aiguader i Miró, Companys and the other Generalitat ministers sat alongside the leaders of all the main Catalan political parties, including the Lliga. Also present were prominent judicial figures like Anguera de Sojo, members of business and property-owning associations, including the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional and the COPUB, as well as the Barcelona Chief-of-Police and high-ranking military officials. A perusal of the guest-lists of these soirees, which continued throughout the years of the Republic, revealed the consolidation of a new system of patronage in the city. While this Republican élite embraced many from the professional middle class who had been excluded by the monarchy and was, therefore, a far wider social circle than its monarchist predecessor, the élitist economic pressure groups which supported the anti-democratic régimes of the past remained within the new Republican network.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the traditionally close relationship between bourgeois Barcelona and the local authorities was not broken by the Republic. Moreover, the acceptance by the Esquerra of values like 'order' and 'hierarchy' revealed that its 'populist-republican' project was, in essence, little more than a slightly radicalised version of the traditional nationalist goal of class collaboration between the socially distinct elements within the Catalan national

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<sup>96</sup> L'Opinió, 10 June 1931; La Vanguardia, 8 July, 26 August 1931; Las Noticias, 16 May 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 2, 4 June 1931

<sup>97</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 9 May 1931; L'Opinió, 9, 13, 26 June, 14 July 1931; Poblet, Aiguader, p.179; Las Noticias, 12 May, 18 December 1931



community. This is not to say that the Republic was the same as the monarchy. Clearly, not only did the new régime recognise democratic protocols in a manner unseen in Spain's past but, it was also more socially inclusive than previous régimes. Despite this, however, the conflicts of the unemployed and the unskilled in the early months of the Republic illustrated the limits of social inclusion under the democracy and highlighted the reality that the aspirations of sizeable sections of the population of Barcelona had been ignored by the transition. Moreover, within the 'Republic of order' the exclusion of marginal social sectors was set to become even more discernible.

#### **4.6. The Spectre of the 'Underclass': the 'Deserving' versus the 'Undeserving' Poor**

The growing social exclusiveness of the Esquerra was reflected in its plans for a 'vigilant democracy'. It was increasingly obvious that those who had to be watched were from the lower echelons of society. This task required a new '[security] service for the protection of the Republic'. The Catalan Republicans were becoming fixated with the need for specialised police teams dedicated to the repression of specific social groups. They had already created the Brigade for the Repression of Street Trade to eliminate the jobless traders, and they followed this by organising two new forces, one to clean the port of villainous people' and another for 'rounding up beggars and tramps'. Meanwhile, in keeping with the formula of a 'vigilant democracy', tough new punishments were introduced for anybody found in possession of an unlicensed firearm and stiffer penalties were enacted for those without adequate identification. The ERC also hoped to introduce a national identity card scheme to replace the discredited *cédula personal* system, a system that for years had allowed the free adoption of *noms de guerre* and aliases through the cards issued to payees of the non-compulsory Council tax. Not only was it possible to pay the tax for a number of different addresses under assumed names but, addresses could be invented and on more than one occasion police in l'Hospitalet searched for individuals who had given fictional addresses in half-built streets.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Las Noticias, 6 October 1931; L'Opinió, 11, 13, 16 August 1931

Before these changes were enacted the Esquerra offset the absence of intelligence in the sprawling ghettos on the periphery of the city by integrating the 'People's Mayors' of April 14 into the emergent structures of repression. Following the fragmentation of 'the people', the People's Mayors' used their knowledge of their erstwhile allies in the fight against the monarchy to consolidate the 'Republic of order'. The Councillors of l'Hospitalet played a new intelligence-gathering function within the overall network of containment placed around the city's rebellious populace. As part of the long-term project of enhancing state control over civil society, the Mayor regularly pooled information concerning the background and conduct of his citizens with the judiciary, especially those 'dangerous individuals' with 'criminal records'. In one such report, the Mayor described José Alberola, an anarchist educationalist and a veteran of the struggle against the monarchy, as a regular 'trouble-maker' who had been jailed on a number of occasions. Meanwhile, another CNT unemployment activist was referred to as 'having a dangerous background, always figuring in patrols of ill-intentioned people (sic!)'. The 'intelligence-gathering' role of municipal politicians also contributed to the process of disciplining the jobless by investigating requests for information on the 'background' and 'conduct' of workers from an array of official bodies in order to distinguish the 'truly unemployed worker' from 'layabouts' and the 'work-shy'.<sup>99</sup>

The greatest energies of the authorities were directed towards the Barri xino. In the 1920s, 'Paco' Madrid wrote widely on the dangerous threat of the *baix fons*, the 'underworld' of Barcelona. Like much of bourgeois opinion, these moral strictures concentrated on the presumed criminogenic features of this 'forbidden zone' and the assumed moral shortcomings of many of its inhabitants who, it was asserted, had made a conscious choice in favour of a life of leisure outside the official economy, paid for by 'easy money' (*dinero fácil*). It was axiomatic in Republican circles that the scum of European society, bolstered by members of the Marseille mafia, had converged on neutral Barcelona during World War One in an attempt to flee either the draft or

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<sup>99</sup> Mayor's notes on Orden del Juzgado Municipal to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 28 August 1931, 20 April 1932 (AHLL); *L'Opinió*, 25 July 1931; *Correspondència de l'Ajuntament de l'Hospitalet*, 1930-36 (AHLL)

wartime labour conscription. Thereafter, they had formed a criminal underworld during the *bella epoca* war years, enriching themselves from the political and industrial intrigues in the city, as well as from prostitution, racketeering and narcotics. Finally, with the coming of the Republic, the authorities sustained that the organised criminals in the Barri xino had wrested control of part of downtown Barcelona. By exploiting the sometimes irrational popular fears about prostitution, usurious pimps and opium and cocaine pushers, the authorities justified their repressive crusades in favour of 'public morality' and sought to gain wider assent for their plan to re-establish the authority in an area that they portrayed as outside official control. Egged on by Companys during his spell as Civil Governor, Police Chief Menéndez set about reimposing the 'principle of authority' in a puritanical drive against the hidden economy of the Barri xino. However, it was noticeable from the start, that the police moved as heavily against the jobless street traders and the unemployed as much as the drug pushers, petty criminals and the organisers of illegal gaming for whom the campaign was invoked.<sup>100</sup>

From the beginning of the crusade against 'badness' in the Barri xino, Police Chief Menéndez relied on the *ràtzia*, the lightning raid used by the monarchist security forces on streets or bars that were believed to be 'criminal haunts'. Needless to say, the *ràtzia* was a highly indiscriminate tactic. This was compounded by the tendency of the police to place the onus on detainees to prove their innocence. Nevertheless, the Republican authorities saw the *ràtzia* as vital to the extension of police control over the hostile population of the Barri xino. However, the objectives of *ràtzies* remained as questionable as ever and in one swoop a number of individuals were detained even though there was not the slightest evidence that any of them had committed an offence. In fact, only occasionally did these raids lead to the detention of individuals who were actually wanted for specific offences. Meanwhile, despite the public recognition of *habeas corpus* and the due processes of the law by the Republic, the police exploited the cover afforded by the *quintzenes*, another old monarchist practice, to rely on what was euphemistically referred to as 'intensive interviewing', away from the prying intervention

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<sup>100</sup> Francisco Madrid, *Sangre en Atarazanas*, Barcelona, 1926, *passim*.; *El Escándolo*, 22, 29 October 1925, 6, 20 May, 15 July, 7, 14 October 1926; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.156-157, 175

of magistrates and defence lawyers. Similarly, brutality and the illegal use of the 'third degree' remained integral components of interrogations, especially for those detained under the *quintzenes*.<sup>101</sup> Ironically, therefore, the readiness of the Republicans to defend the 'principle of authority' led them to diverge from established legal practice and employ the very procedures that they had earlier condemned.

Another continuity between the Republican police methods and those of the monarchy was that crime was regarded as an essentially working class activity. The underlying assumption behind the police campaign in the Barri xino was the traditional perspective that *all* crime could be attributed to the working class, particularly the unemployed. Accordingly, police stereotypes of the villain remained anchored around caricatures of the urban working class. Nevertheless, as elsewhere in capitalist Europe, crime remained a supra-class activity and, at different times, members of all social classes in Barcelona behaved illegally, as in instances of employers who ignored workplace safety legislation, shopkeepers who adulterated foodstuffs and doctored weights and measures, landlords who flaunted housing legislation and the widespread middle class predilection for confidence tricks and tax evasion. Indeed, a Council inspection team found that the 'majority' of traders in one Barcelona market doctored their scales.<sup>102</sup> If, after this litany of petit bourgeois illegality, workers still figured more prominently in the crime pages, this largely reflected the disproportionate amount of attention the police directed to tracking them down and the willingness of the press to dwell on one specific form of illegality at the expense of others.

In reality, what distinguished what Frank Pearce has called 'the crimes of the powerful' from popular illegality was not their seriousness, nor even their legal status, but the perception and response of the authorities. This was illustrated by the scant official comment that followed the savage beating and murder of an unemployed worker

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<sup>101</sup> *Las Noticias*, 9 May 1931; *L'Opinió*, 29 July 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 October 1932, 1 July 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 7, 24 October 1932

<sup>102</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.202, 214; Enrique Serrano Fatigati, 'Alimentos adulterados y defunciones. Apuntes para el estudio de la vida obrera en España', *Estudios de Historia Social*, 15, 1980, pp.297-303; *Las Noticias*, 16 June, 14-15 November 1931; *El Día Gráfico*, 26 November 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 7 April 1932; *La Calle*, 16 October, 6 November 1931; *La Publicitat*, 10 January 1932

caught stealing from allotments in l'Hospitalet by smallholding peasants.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the disparities between the punishments meted out to jobless workers who stole from shopkeepers, on the one hand, and the shopkeepers who cheated workers by watering down milk and doctoring scales, on the other, revealed that the authorities viewed illegal acts against the petit bourgeoisie to be far more serious than criminal acts detrimental to the consumer. Meanwhile, although the authorities refused to ignore middle class crime with the same benign tolerance as their monarchical predecessors, sanctions were applied against the established classes in a highly controlled manner: they often never exceeded warnings, they rarely extended to imprisonment, and they were never accompanied by the police beatings apportioned to deviant proletarians. Consequently, the aphorism that 'the working class is policed by the state, while the middle class is merely inspected', was confirmed by the Republic.

In keeping with its growing concern with law-and-order, the Republican press assuaged the security fears of the middle classes with a journalistic campaign far removed from its past interpretation of illegality as a socio-economic phenomenon linked to the inequalities of material life. This journalistic zeal, matched with the new post-dictatorial freedoms of reportage, contrived to produce a highly misleading picture of street crime. Newspapers sometimes carried news of minor infractions of the law, such as bag-snatching or shoplifting, on successive days. The thrust of the exaggerated focus on illegality was to vindicate publicly the pursuit of the 'principle of authority' within a 'Republic of order'. Thus, one Republican maintained that because Barcelona was besieged by an incessant wave of 'assaults, robberies, theft, violence...it may not be possible to build a peaceful society'. The ERC press attempted to manufacture public acceptance of 'discipline' and 'order', asserting that 'the salvation of the Republic lies in respect for the principle of authority'. L'Opinió dropped its reservations towards the security forces, describing the police as a force that warranted 'the maximum respect' and had to be strengthened as 'a symbol of authority' for the Republic. Meanwhile, the monarchist Civil Guard was described as 'the guard of the Republic'. Las Noticias, a

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<sup>103</sup> Frank Pearce, The Crimes of the Powerful, London, 1976; Las Noticias, 4, 6 December 1931

newspaper with proud traditions of uncovering police corruption, made a similar *volte face*. Las Noticias became highly receptive to police press releases, even in cases bereft of firm evidence and where irregular police procedures had been employed. Illegality, or 'banditry' (*apachismo*) in the view of Las Noticias, was increasingly seen in psychological and sensationalist terms, epitomised by bizarre allegations that 'specialist thieves' were at work in Barcelona dedicated to the highly unskilled practice of snatching ladies handbags. It was even alleged that street crime was the work of gangs who had a wider 'mission of committing robberies to discredit the Republican régime'. Perhaps most staggering of all, Joan Ventalló, from the left-wing of the Esquerra and a leading member of the L'Opinió group, made the instrumental identification between joblessness and crime, declaring that unemployment was a 'problem of public order, a simple police problem'.<sup>104</sup>

The ERC disingenuously removed the activities of the unemployed from their wider socio-economic context, opining that forms of behaviour which were clearly inspired by the deteriorating socio-economic situation in Barcelona were, in fact, part of a criminal conspiracy bent on subverting established morality. Thus, unemployment agitation and illegality were increasingly seen as the outcome of conscious subversion, as if they were calculated attacks on the new régime. According to Companys, 'criminals impersonating the unemployed' 'stirred up' the jobless to commit 'criminal acts' and 'outrages' in keeping with the plans of 'undesirable elements', 'anonymous subversives' and 'all the malefactors (*maleantes*) in Barcelona' who sought to become the 'lords of the streets'. Similarly, Police Chief Menéndez interpreted attacks on the security forces as the outcome of dark machinations against the Republic. These views were matched with a growing resentment that the new freedoms were being exploited by the jobless. Both L'Opinió and Anguera de Sojo berated groups such as the CDE and the cowardly unemployed for remaining quiet when 'it was more dangerous' to protest during the dictatorship, yet acting with 'abandon' under the democracy, as the new liberties allowed

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<sup>104</sup> L'Opinió, 14, 17 July, 16 August, 23 October 1931, 29 April, 31 May 1932; Llibertat, 6 June 1931; L'Obra, 12 September 1931; Las Noticias, 7 March, 29 April, 3, May, 8 November 1931, 11 May 1934; Petition of the Centre d'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya del Districte tercer de l'Hospitalet to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 10 January 1932 (AHLL)

them to 'feel brave'. Even 'crimes against property' were viewed as anti-governmental plots and were doubly condemned, firstly, as infringements of the criminal code, then as an affront towards the new régime. These views of an anti-Republican intrigue were echoed by 'Paco' Madrid, who alleged that 'all those people who didn't mutter a word during seven contemptible years of dictatorship, now met in the Plaça de la República and demanded work'. The thrust of these reprimands supported the project of the 'Republic of Order'. *L'Opinió* explained that because the Republic had introduced 'the government of the people', all violence, whether in strikes or mobilisations by the unemployed, was 'intolerable', an unacceptable 'attack' on the new order, the work of 'armed enemies of the people'. This exclusiveness was echoed by Gil i Gil, who maintained that any transgression of the law was the work of 'an enemy of democracy', including the jobless street traders, all of whom were 'enemies of the Republic'. Meanwhile, according to Ventalló, although 'moving along a non-violent path', the Republic will not be 'a weak regime' nor will it 'tolerate a minority that attempts to disturb order in the hope of imposing a system of oppression on a people that has yielded a regime of freedom'.<sup>105</sup>

In fact, as in the case of the 1931 strike-wave, the actions of the jobless were not part of a conspiracy to subvert the Republic. Rather they reflected the rearguard battle for survival of the most depressed sectors of the urban proletariat, a battle that preceded the Republic. For example, the campaign for a reduction in rents and the mobilisations of the unemployed both began during the *Dictablanda*. Similarly, popular traditions of the unemployed rejecting municipal soup kitchens in favour of work, food requisitioning and 'collective protest by riot' ran deep among the workers of Barcelona.<sup>106</sup> The ERC failed to appreciate this and the party's increasingly proprietorial attitude towards a régime that was the end product of its political odyssey meant that it found it near impossible to accept any criticisms of the Republic, whether valid or not. In turn, this sensitivity fused

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<sup>105</sup> *L'Opinió*, 6 May, 24 June, 16, 20, 26-27 August, 22 September, 23 October 1931; *Llibertat*, 6 June 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.145, 158; *Minutes of l'Hospitalet Council meeting*, 10 January 1933 (AHLL); *Las Noticias*, 4 June 1931

<sup>106</sup> García Oliver, *El eco*, p.115; Arranz, Camps, et. al., *El Poblenou*, p.144; Kaplan, *Red City*, pp.122-123

into a highly exclusive attitude towards the unemployed and the belief that the jobless had no legitimate right to protest about their situation. This found its culmination in the view of the Esquerra that the main problem with joblessness was not the poverty imposed by unemployment but, the acts of protest that accompanied it.<sup>107</sup>

This was not simply a case of misinterpreting the origins of the social protest of the unemployed: it was part of a concerted effort of the Republican authorities to criminalise the struggles of the jobless and separate militant unemployed activists from the bulk of the workless. In an attempt to vilify the activists who sought to organise the jobless, the authorities borrowed heavily from the lexicon of previous monarchical administrations. The Republicans successively attributed the orchestration of the mobilisations of the unemployed to 'outside elements', 'reactionaries', 'the detritus of the city', 'the enemy within', 'enemies of the Republic' and 'provocateurs' who paid the poor 'ten pesetas' to cause 'disturbances' and 'outrages'. Similarly, mass mobilisations like the rent strike, which drew in thousands of people, were attributed to the 'anarchic action' of 'a minority of tenants' and 'professional agitators', 'a few hundred spoilers' and 'irresponsible loudmouths' whose base 'manoeuvres' and 'shameful demonstrations' were 'a danger and a discredit to the city'. Meanwhile, it became orthodoxy for the authorities that 'detritus' impersonated the jobless to disrupt public order. 'Paco' Madrid spoke of 'picturesque criminals who pass as unemployed workers', while Azaña believed that unemployment was grossly exaggerated by 'the clandestine propagandist [and], the professional agitator'. Even acts of 'eating without paying' were blamed on 'people with bad backgrounds', not 'the real unemployed'.<sup>108</sup>

The growing impact of unemployed struggles impelled Republicans to dwell on the 'subversion' of the radical left. By looking leftwards, the Republicans ignored the provocateurs on the right in Barcelona, like the monarchist rabble-rousers denounced in the worker press for impersonating building contractors and making false offers of work

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<sup>107</sup> Las Noticias, 27 June 1931; L'Opinió, 24 June, 10, 17 July, 13 August, 23 October, 19 November 1931

<sup>108</sup> Las Noticias, 1 May, 4, 27 June, 13 December 1931; L'Opinió, 24 June, 10, 17 July, 13, 20-21 August, 23 October, 19 November 1931; Madrid, Ocho meses, pp.145, 158; La Vanguardia, 1 May, 15 July, 19-20 August 1931; Azaña, Obras, vol.2, pp.67-68; El Diluvio, 1 May 1931; El Matí, 4 June 1931



to unemployed construction workers. Highlighting the priorities of the authorities, a group of unemployed builders from the Barri xino who had been left standing on a street corner awaiting bogus building contractors, was viciously attacked by police as it set off to protest to the Civil Governor. According to Solidaridad Obrera the authorities now wished to punish the victims of unemployment, while allowing rightists to 'play with the miserable situation' of the jobless. Suggesting that the attention of the authorities was now directed disproportionately towards revolutionaries, Anguera de Sojo was obsessed with signs of the dark conspiracy of 'the mysterious force' of the FAI. Equally, illegality was near-exclusively attributed to leftist anti-Republican 'deviants' and despite evidence to the contrary, Las Noticias chose to describe an armed gang of *ex-libreños* and rightists who robbed a cinema as 'communists'.<sup>109</sup>

The fixation with 'agitators' and 'conspirators' reflected the ERC plan to pacify the jobless by dividing them along the traditional lines of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. According to this schema, the 'deserving' poor or the 'real unemployed', that is to say, those deemed capable of self-improvement, merited official assistance and were to be integrated within the networks of municipal assistance. Meanwhile, the 'undeserving' poor, which was expanded to include unemployed organisers and street vendors, were 'deviants', 'undesirables' or the 'professional poor', who represented a danger to society and had, therefore, to be repressed.<sup>110</sup>

The endeavours of the authorities to demarcate the unemployed on these lines grew in direct proportion to the incidence of social agitation. This policy was initially articulated by Companys who, following the first unemployed riots after the birth of the Republic, announced that only 'honourable and dignified workers' would receive relief from the authorities. After further unemployed riots in early July, Ventalló committed himself to helping 'the real unemployed who do not go around the streets making a show

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<sup>109</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 12 May 1931; Madrid, Ocho meses, pp.139, 188-189; L'Opinió, 9 September 1931; Las Noticias, 3 November 1931, La Vanguardia, 16 February 1933; Ramón Fernández Jurado, Memòries d'un militant obrer (1930-1942), Barcelona, 1987, p.314. The idiocy of the anti-communism of the Esquerra was resplendent in July, when one its members attributed all the mobilisations of the jobless to the Catalan Stalinists, ignorant of the fact that their puny forces had little or no influence over the unemployed in the Catalan capital: L'Opinió, 17 July 1931.

<sup>110</sup> See J. Serna, 'La desocupacio i el control social', Batlia, 8, 1988, pp.9-23; L'Opinió, 21 August, 2 December 1931

of themselves and attacking market stalls but, who remain at home, choosing not to create spectacles with professional layabouts'. The next month Barcelona Council began differentiating between what it called 'the unemployed', who it promised to assist, and 'those who have never worked' and 'the unskilled' ('los sin oficio'), who were to be interned in workhouses.<sup>111</sup>

The value of this distinction was that it split the unemployed, by offering financial support to 'morally healthy' individuals in return for their 'social discipline'. Meanwhile, this notion gained the acceptance of the 'deserving' poor for the repression the 'anti-social' activities of the 'undeserving' poor, who were believed to pose a danger to both society and an impediment to the solution of the problems facing the 'deserving' poor. In a typical flight of vitriol, L'Opinió blamed all the problems of the unemployed on:

'those who have never worked, nor have any wish to work; the professional vagabond who does nothing other than collect junk from the street, who sleeps under a lion at the monument to Columbus [at the port end of Les Rambles] and resigns himself to living from the left-overs of the grub at the barracks. The worker who cannot find work, and who we must find work for, is one thing, and the professional tramps are another'.

The *bona fide* jobless were, therefore, implored to ostracise 'those people without any wish to work' and ignore the advice 'subversives', whereafter the authorities would begin to address the problems facing 'the real unemployed workers'.<sup>112</sup>

This prognosis appealed to the aspirations of self-advancement of skilled workers: it promised to civilise uncouth plebeians and bring culture to the unskilled. Most importantly of all, the views of the authorities reaffirmed the official consensus that it was legitimate to deploy police measures against the jobless. This was timely, because increasingly the activities of the police and the scant welfare services overlapped in the drive to isolate 'troublemakers' and 'ensure that only the truly unemployed workers are assisted'. Accordingly, there were a series of police round-ups of 'tramps', beggars, 'malefactors' and homeless unemployed workers, who were photographed and filed, before being either jailed or interned in workhouses. Meanwhile, the Council Welfare

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<sup>111</sup> Las Noticias, 1 May 1931; L'Opinió, 17 July 1931; La Vanguardia, 13 August 1931

<sup>112</sup> L'Opinió, 10 July 1931

Department played a leading role in this repression because, as one commentator noted, 'it is not difficult for the organisers of the welfare services to tell who needs assistance and who must be persecuted'.<sup>113</sup>

The 'deserving'/'undeserving' poor dichotomy became a favourite propaganda weapon for the Republicans. In the rent strike, the Esquerra raised the spectre of the 'undeserving' poor to isolate the strike organisers from their potential supporters. In a blatant attempt to incite envy and turn public opinion against the strikers, the ERC also spread unproven allegations that striking tenants in the *Cases Barates* were spending the money they normally paid in rent on extravagant alterations to their flats and that some were sub-letting their flats and renting luxurious flats elsewhere. It was even maintained that a number of strikers had started small businesses with the savings they had made during the rent strike and that they had moved away to live in villas along the Catalan coast. More plainly, the strikers were pilloried as being 'uncivilised' or as 'squatters'.<sup>114</sup>

Tales of the nefarious, anti-social ways of the 'undeserving' poor were an appropriate foil to the plans of the authorities to prune the welfare budget and make a section of the unemployed responsible for its own welfare. So, while the Esquerra promised to help the 'deserving poor' it felt that 'the truly needy children of Barcelona' should not get 'a single penny directly'. This stance was justified by the authorities through a succession of largely unsubstantiated stories about a thriving black market in vouchers. The Republican press joined this campaign, projecting images of the unemployed as 'tricksters' and 'con-men' from the Barri xino and outlining the dangers of showing benevolence to inveterate wrongdoers. *L'Opinió* revealed that 'the professionals of common crime, jail-birds, tramps, those living outside the law, those who have never worked nor wish to, salaried subversives and those among the unemployed who dedicate themselves to the lucrative business of buying up the vouchers' were enriching themselves at the expense of the Council and, of course, the 'deserving' poor. Such claims were complemented by a cartoon published in *L'Opinió*, entitled 'The New Land

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<sup>113</sup> *El Matí*, 4 June 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.137-138; Fernando Barangó-Solis, *Reportajes pintorescos*, Barcelona, 1934, p.181; *La Vanguardia*, 13 August 1931

<sup>114</sup> *L'Opinió*, 6 May 1931

of Milk and Honey', which portrayed jobless workers in the Parc de la Ciutadella, one of their favourite haunts, engaged in an Epicurean orgy of sunbathing, picnics, outdoor games and love-making. It was even averred that some of these 'professional layabouts' were so adept at their trade that they spent weekends in the seaside resorts of Castelldefels and Montgat. Meanwhile, according to 'unnamed shopkeepers' other 'fraudsters' regularly exchanged 40 or 50 vouchers at a time for the most expensive meats, patés and quality wines.<sup>115</sup>

Official propaganda and the concentration on voucher fraud carried the clear message that unemployment was the harbinger of crime. By isolating poverty from its social context, the emphasis on the 'undeserving' poor transformed the question of unemployment into an essentially moral issue, explaining the immense poverty of a section of the working class as the outcome of its immoral ways. Republican social philosophy, therefore, remained trapped in a highly traditional strait-jacket and reversed the causes of unemployment, postulating that joblessness was derived from the individual shortcomings of the out-of-work themselves, rather than the contradictions of what Fernando Álvarez-Uría has described as 'an arbitrary productive system that obliges millions of citizens to renounce their own identity and humanity, to alienate themselves, to survive'.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, for the Republicans, the greatest ill engendered by unemployment was not poverty, but the dangers this represented for social mores.

The incapacity of the Republicans to comprehend the series of circumstances that led from unemployment to poverty, homelessness or illegality, impelled them to focus instead on the 'bad ways' of a degenerate and poorly socialised urban 'underclass', the 'dangerous class' of élite demonology, which, due to its failure to overcome its desperate circumstances, was seen to be beyond redemption and moral regeneration. Because the 'underclass' apparently chose to live the way it did in its ghettoised hovels and, therefore, 'allowed' itself to be brutalised by social degradation, the authorities saw no need to help its wretched members. Instead, as confirmed by the voucher fraud, throwing money at

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<sup>115</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 October 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 13 August 1931; *La Publicitat*, 8, 12 June 1931; *L'Opinió*, 17-19, 24-25 July, 29 August, 2 December 1931

<sup>116</sup> Fernando Álvarez-Uría, 'Vells i nous pobres. Rodamons i pobres vàlids a la llum de les ciències socials i polítiques', *Acàcia*, 3, 1993, p.85

the problem of unemployment only created more immorality, the authorities concluded. Thus through its incapacity to accept its social responsibilities and its inability to abide by fundamental public morals, this 'underclass' was a burden and a living threat to the rest of society and, therefore, had to be watched.

The theory of the 'underclass', thereby, allowed the Republicans to stigmatise sections of the unemployed and create fiendish stereotypes of 'criminal types' around which a repressive consensus could be galvanised. At the same time, the spectre of the 'underclass' satisfied the bourgeoisie and the authorities as it exonerating the economic and political status quo of all responsibility for unemployment, blaming instead the victims, who were portrayed as a socially and morally inferior tribe of degenerates, a dangerous conglomeration that presented a mortal danger to both bourgeois property and the Republican political agenda for change.<sup>117</sup>

The preoccupation with an 'underclass' amalgamated with existing fears about the non-Catalan population.<sup>118</sup> The strains placed on the agencies of law-and-order by the rapid urbanisation and demographic expansion of the 1920s and the uncertainties this created in the minds of the middle and upper classes were attributed to the southern Spanish immigrants, who were seen as unnecessary additions to the 'sunken' and 'dangerous' classes of urban Catalonia. The calls by Esquerra for the 'purification' of the 'undeserving' poor from the jobless were increasingly interspersed with images of 'parasitic immigrants' coming to Catalonia to 'be unemployed'. This perception was heightened by the practice of the ERC to describe the unemployed in Spanish as 'los sin trabajo' or 'los parados', rather than in Catalan as 'els sense feina' or 'els parats'. Meanwhile, without any concession to reality, an array of demons, ranging from street vendors, criminals and *faístas*, were crudely equated with the immigrants, as the Esquerra established a stereotypical profile of the good Catalan worker and the irascible Spanish outsider. This identification was heightened in the public mind through the practice of the judiciary to state the birthplace of detainees from outside Catalonia in its

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<sup>117</sup> *Las Noticias*, 17 June 1931; *L'Opinió*, 17, 19 July 1931

<sup>118</sup> Vandellós, *La immigració*, *passim*.

press releases, even though this lacked judicial significance and was not applied consistently to offenders from Catalonia.<sup>119</sup>

The anti-immigrant backlash of the *Catalanistes* grew in proportion to the economic crisis. Immigration was also a cross-party issue that transcended the formal political divisions of the right and left and it was interpreted by the Lliga and Esquerra alike as an affront to the new régime, a criminal act in its own right and 'an offensive against Catalonia'. The strength of this xenophobic campaign meant that during the Republic, for the first time ever, immigration was exploited as a political issue by a ruling party in Catalonia.<sup>120</sup>

Invoking 'the general interests of the Republic', the Esquerra engaged in a xenophobic diatribe against the very immigrant masses who had voted for its in the April and the June elections and endorsed the Statute. Now, however, worried that its programme of class harmony and national unity was threatened by the push of unskilled workers and the unemployed to improve their material conditions, the Esquerra regarded these masses as illiterate creatures who were ignorant of Republican enlightenment philosophy and a danger to their historic project of political modernisation. Symptomatic of the parochial exclusiveness of the ERC, Dencàs regretted the presence of so many interlopers in 'our house' (*casa nostra*), intruders who threatened the already fragile social situation in Barcelona. Employing the same discourse of the alien invasion, L'Opinió damned the 'trains that arrive full of people who come to be unemployed' and form 'swarms' of beggars and 'undeserving' poor. With similar rage, Republicans in l'Hospitalet, 'the gateway to Barcelona', vilified 'virulent plagues' of 'outsiders'. This supremacist imagery of immigrants 'flooding' into Catalonia 'systematically', 'by the trainload', was a constant theme of the Republican press, whose favourite caricature became 'the illiterate murcian', who 'one fine day arrived in Barcelona with the murcian truck, the carrier of a fair contingent of "sin trabajo"'. Meanwhile, highlighting the 'undeserving' status of the immigrants, according to Llibertat, a l'Hospitalet ERC weekly, 'when they arrive in a town the first thing they ask for is the welfare office'. This 'army' of

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<sup>119</sup> L'Opinió, 17, 19, 25 July, 2 December 1931, 26 October 1932; La Publicitat, 10 July 1931

<sup>120</sup> Termes, Federalismo, p.143; L'Opinió, 10 July 1931

'vegetating' immigrants constituted an 'asphyxiating' burden on already stretched welfare resources, 'robbing the bread of our Catalan children' and converting Catalonia into a 'poor house'.<sup>121</sup>

The nominal leftism of the Esquerra increasingly failed to mask its growing inner bigotry, as reflected in its condemnation of 'Japanese imperialism' as 'the yellow peril'!<sup>122</sup> The immigration issue also graphically revealed the social élitism of the Republican project. Indeed, the ERC did not object to immigrants *per se* and some 'outsiders' figured in its ranks, albeit of a higher social standing than the unskilled Andalusian immigrants that were excoriated in its press. However, what the Esquerra really disliked was the threat posed by the predominantly immigrant-based 'new' working class. The immigration issue exposed the extent to which the Esquerra's idealised view of the humble home life of the 'good worker' without 'vices' was poles apart from the stifling poverty of the unskilled and the unemployed. These masses were feared by the Esquerra as an irrational, dark, cultureless force and, while they needed the general assent of the masses, the Republican political project increasingly left little room for the mobilisation of autonomous working class organisation. To be sure, the benign reformism of the ERC and the élitist Fabians of the USC was forged in the mind of the intellectual middle class and was anchored in the assumption that the masses were a culturally retarded social sector, likely to confuse what was in its best interests if it was not led by enlightened professionals. Even ostensibly radical figures, such as Aiguader i Miró, held a thoroughly dismissive view of passive, atomised urban masses whose civic ignorance highlighted their need for political and moral leadership by the educated middle class. Accordingly, the urban masses were assigned the position of spectators within a process of social change calmly mapped out by perspicacious politicians.<sup>123</sup>

Throughout the rest of the Republic the Esquerra pointed to the spectre of immigration to justify its policy on unemployment. Immigration gave the party a new pretext to reject unemployment subsidies as an 'absurd, anti-economic and anti-social'

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<sup>121</sup> *L'Opinió*, 10 July, 13 August, 5 November, 2 December 1931, 17 May, 26 October, 2 December 1932; *El Diluvio*, 6 May 1931; *Llibertat*, 5 August, 5 October, 20 December 1933

<sup>122</sup> *L'Opinió*, 18 May 1932

<sup>123</sup> *L'Opinió*, 1 August 1931; *Fortitud*, 1 July 1933; Poblet, *Aiguader*, pp.42-43

measure that would 'attract all the unemployed of Spain to Barcelona'. The ERC also denounced all manifestations of charity on the same grounds. Meanwhile, despite a clause in its party statutes recognising 'the freedom of movement and selection of residence', the ERC accepted a key demand of the bourgeoisie and committed itself to ending the status of Barcelona as an 'open city' by halting the 'invasion' through the construction of a 'cordon sanitaire' of immigration controls. It even favoured a 'passport' system that required incomers to present a valid work permit or proof of savings. Repatriation was also introduced 'for those elements who may aggravate the problem of unemployment in our city and in Catalonia' because, as *L'Opinió* put it, 'nobody would tolerate an unknown individual installing themselves in their house simply under the pretext that it is better than their own'. Enforced by a new immigration police based at the city's train stations, road entrances and port, it was hoped that these 'hard but fair' measures would reduce unemployment by at least 50% and, while the ERC conceded that they signified an attack on civil liberties, it justified them by its 'right to prevent those from coming who might create conflicts'.<sup>124</sup>

The repressive stance adopted by the Esquerra was encouraged by the central Republican government which restricted the entrance of foreign workers into Spain and saw immigration as a matter of 'public order'. This policy found its apogee in the highly distasteful practice of summarily expelling anti-fascists and refugees from the growing number of authoritarian régimes that abounded in Europe and Latin America during the 1920s and 1930s. This meant that Portuguese, Bulgarians, Argentinians and, especially Italians, were repeatedly cast into the abyss of a hostile continent by the authorities, sometimes after being held unconstitutionally without trial for over 15 months. Yet few places left to go in a continent increasingly under the grip of dictatorship, it was common for émigrés to flout expulsion orders.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Comercio y Navegación*, May 1931; *L'Opinió*, 10, 19 July, 29 August, 2 December 1931; *La Nau*, 22, 27-28 April, 3 May 1931

<sup>125</sup> Luís Martín-Granizo and Mariano González Rothvoss, *Derecho social*, Madrid, 1936, p.319; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 September, 13, 28 November 1931, 24, 29 March, 2 April, 6 August, 20 October, 5 November, 7 December 1932, 24 August 1933, 29 September 1934, 16 January 1935; *Tiempos Nuevos*, 31 January 1935



The repatriation of non-Catalans to their Spanish birthplaces was a similar failure. There were numerous instances of deported immigrants returning almost immediately to their adopted home, knowing that the factories of Catalonia provided better chances of finding work than the arid fields of southern Spain. In some instances, unemployed workers who were repatriated as 'beggars' twice in the same week still managed to return to Barcelona by the weekend. Despite the expense and limited success of the repatriation programme, the policy remained the cornerstone of ERC thinking on unemployment and it received the full support from its coalition partners in the USC. Even Serra i Moret saw no contradiction between his belief in socialism and his belief that unemployment was caused by the immigrant workers who came to work in Barcelona before the 1929 World Exhibition, rather than the contradictions of capitalist production.<sup>126</sup>

From 1931 onwards all the unemployment initiatives developed by the ERC had some kind of a draconian component at their core. For instance, the statistics of the Generalitat Departament de Treball, the Catalan Labour Ministry were directed to differentiating between the unemployed according to their birthplace. This allowed the authorities to repatriate 'unworthy' immigrants, while offering limited financial assistance to 'needy' and 'deserving' Catalans. Similarly, Barcelona Council issued the 'Targeta d'Obrer Parat', a much-disliked identity card scheme that recorded the work record of the jobless and carried the penalty of the workhouse or repatriation for those who did not possess it. The Generalitat Unemployed Workers' Commission also continued to police the unemployed and became heavily involved in sifting the 'undeserving' immigrant jobless chaff from the 'real unemployed' wheat. The Institute of Workers' Assistance (Institut d'Asistència Obrera), another semi-official unemployed body created by the Generalitat, was formed, in the words of *L'Opinió*, 'not to give to the poor but, to repatriate outsiders and round up the tramps' and 'to separate the problem of unemployment from that of "idleness"', that 'permanent disease which threatens the peace of all peoples'. In conjunction with 'a special police force' formed within the

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<sup>126</sup> *L'Opinió*, 10 July 1931, 7 April 1934; *La Nau*, 27 April 1931

Guàrdia Urbana to intern the homeless, vagrants and street traders, the Institute of Workers' Assistance began to fulfil the 'laborious task' of the 'purification' (*depuració*) of the jobless.<sup>127</sup> Meanwhile, to receive unemployment assistance from the Unemployed Workers' Commission the jobless had first to agree to accept any work they were offered and fulfil a series of stringent conditions, including evidence of residence in Barcelona for at least five years, a clause that excluded the substantial number of immigrants who came to work on the public works programmes of the dictatorship after 1926, as well as the thousands of workers who returned to the city after the contraction of the European economy after 1929 or who went into exile during the years of the dictatorship. Equally questionable were clauses that required proof of 'good conduct' and evidence that the claimant was a 'true worker', two conditions which, considering past battles for trade union recognition, effectively excluded any worker who had ever played an active role in the CNT. Nevertheless, even after 'a rigorous declaration' from the claimant and the satisfaction of all the aforementioned prerequisites, the possibility of financial assistance only existed in situations where 'true need' was proven.<sup>128</sup>

Even within its own parameters the Generalitat Unemployed Workers' Commission was a failure. Firstly, it failed to cater for the needs of the 'deserving' poor. Secondly, it did not keep its promise to assist those in 'true need'. Those with the greatest need, the homeless, were vilified by the Generalitat as 'undeserving vagrants'. This prescriptiveness was thoroughly at odds with of the reality of unemployment in 1930s Barcelona, where the dividing line between housed and homeless was fluid. Lastly, the Generalitat unemployment bodies operated with a torturous gradualism. This was illustrated by the Generalitat-run Labour Exchange (*borsa de treball*) and its Council-organised equivalent. Although both of these quasi-official labour exchanges were tied to centres of local power and offered the possibility of employment to its members through clientelism and political favouritism, they nevertheless managed only to find work for 11% of their unemployed members in 1931. Consequently, these bodies

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<sup>127</sup> *L'Opinió*, 19, 25 July, 13, 29 August 1931 *La Nau*, 27 April 1931

<sup>128</sup> *El Matí*, 21 June 1931; *L'Opinió*, 4 August 1932

appealed largely to the more stable and skilled workers, who possessed the patience needed for life in the laboriously bureaucratic official labour exchanges.

The exclusiveness and complicity of official unemployment bodies in repression and repatriation meant that they attracted only a small minority of the jobless, 'the real unemployed' in the view of the ERC. Immigrant workers logically remained outside. This is borne out by the absurdly low numbers of unemployed furnished by the Generalitat borsa de treball, according to which, in mid-1931 there were under 10,000 unemployed workers. Most revealing of all, according to the Generalitat, unemployment in the building industry stood at 3,593. By way of contrast, the Barcelona CNT Builders' Union alone claimed more jobless members than the entire Generalitat Labour Exchange.<sup>129</sup> It is likely that the unemployment figure in the building industry cited by the Generalitat referred almost exclusively to the unemployment of skilled workers and those who were either Catalan or who had lived in Barcelona for years. Meanwhile, the CNT statistics almost certainly referred to unemployment among the unskilled and those who had recently arrived in the Catalan capital. The figure cited by the CNT is almost certainly the more accurate of the two because, as we have already seen, not only did the building industry have some of the highest levels of joblessness in Barcelona but it was also an industry that attracted large numbers of immigrant workers.

This dichotomy and polarisation between the CNT and the Generalitat were most portentous: it reflected the break-up of 'the people' and created the conditions for a full-scale clash between the Confederation and the new authorities, a conflict that generated tremendous enmities that would shake the Republic to its very foundations.

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<sup>129</sup> Balcells, *Crisis*, p.19; Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, pp.359-360; *La Vanguardia*, 13 August 1931; *L'Opinió*, 21 June 1931; Hernández Andreu, *España*, p.97; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 March, 1 November 1931

## Chapter 5: 'The Same Dog With a Different Collar': The FAI and the Republic

### 5.1. Policing the Crisis

The growing realisation by the most militant sections of the Barcelona unemployed that they were excluded from the new democratic institutions was accompanied by a significant rise in proletarian discontent with the Republic. Denied any real opportunity to articulate their aspirations, the unemployed displayed a growing disposition for direct action and aggressive forms of protest. In the middle of July, at the height of its allegations about the misappropriation of Council welfare vouchers, L'Opinió reported that its offices had been 'threatened' by unemployed activists. Meanwhile, the arbitrary procedures of the authorities, such as the banning of unemployed workers' meetings, further fanned the fires of rebellion and simply encouraged jobless workers to adapt clandestinely to legal prescriptions. On the streets, new patterns of violence and repression were established as the security forces and the jobless vied with one another for access to public spaces. Moreover, when the authorities clamped down further on the activities of the unemployed, the results were often unpredictable. For instance, when *Asaltos* were called in to disperse an *al fresco* meeting of the unemployed in the Parc de la Ciutadella, the city park was converted into a battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

These same dynamics of confrontation grew between the security forces and the jobless street vendors. Unable to afford the confiscation of their goods or to meet Council fines, the jobless traders violently resisted the police whenever possible. Because the jobless vendors tended to intervene on each others' behalf against the security forces, street fights increasingly became the order of the day. Just a few days after the destruction of *el mercadet*, vendors trading around Sants market responded aggressively to the confiscation of their goods by the authorities. When the police withdrew, the jobless traders regrouped in a very defiant mood. Holding the stall holders responsible for the repression they had suffered, the unemployed entered the market, threatening traders with knives and clubs, while destroying or stealing their goods. Underlining the

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<sup>1</sup> L'Opinió, 19 July 1931; La Vanguardia, 31 July 1931; Las Noticias, 1-2 December 1931

new combative attitude of the street traders, the following month, when *Asaltos* arrived to disperse them from the market in the neighbouring district of Hostafrancs, there was an 'uprising' (*motin*) of traders, who, together with sympathetic locals, fought off the *Asaltos*, before sacking the market.<sup>2</sup>

Repression only served to aggravate anti-police feelings and strengthen class and community identities. In l'Hospitalet, the spontaneous anger of what the authorities dubbed 'the mob' (*la chusma*) was directed at the police whenever they attempted to arrest the street traders, a diversion that often allowed the vendors to escape. In reply, the police opted for more robust methods of detention in a bid to immobilise street traders before they appealed to the public to intervene on their behalf. This resulted in an increase in police brutality because the swifter the arrest, the more violent was the technique employed. The *Asaltos*, in particular, were criticised for using unnecessary violence when making arrests, even against women and child street traders. This only exacerbated existing enmities towards the security forces and when a 10-year old street trader was hit and killed by a bus as she attempted to escape detention, a crowd of fellow traders and passers-by set about the police.<sup>3</sup>

Police methods did not remove the socio-economic *raison d'être* of the street traders and they were ever-present on the streets of proletarian Barcelona and l'Hospitalet throughout the Republic. At times of stiff repression the traders simply adapted their 'business' to the new terrain imposed by the authorities, many choosing to operate from house doorways, a vantage point which allowed them to survey the streets and to guard against the sequestration of their goods by the police. Furthermore, because the street vendors were often popular figures within their communities, they relied on the considerable goodwill of local people. Whenever the repression relented, the jobless street traders normally returned to the markets. In Sants, as soon as a sustained police drive against 'rebel traders' came to end, there were renewed calls for

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<sup>2</sup> *El Día Gráfico*, 24-25 September 1931; *Las Noticias*, 1, 21 October 1931; *L'Opinió*, 20 August 1931, *La Vanguardia*, 19, 21 August, 24-25 September 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 30, April, 22 May, 27 June, 30 October 1931; *Communiqués from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 17 July, 7 October 1932, 10 April 1936 (AHLL)

<sup>3</sup> *Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 10 June 1933, 10 April 1936 (AHLL); *Solidaridad Obrera*, 7 July 1933, 1 February 1936

new action due to 'extraordinary increases' in 'irregular trade' around the markets. Meanwhile, in the Santa Eulàlia district of l'Hospitalet, street traders braved the repression to sell their wares inside the market, provoking daily incidents with market traders, who predicted that they would soon be outnumbered by the jobless traders. Amid growing conflictivity, market barrow-boys regularly assisted the efforts of the Guàrdia Urbana to flush out the street traders. This prompted a new series of enmities as the jobless street traders responded to this aggression by singling out the barrow boys for beatings. Unbowed by the offensive of the authorities, the street traders remained and, at the height of the recession, l'Hospitalet Council recognised that the number of 'illegal traders' was 'increasing on a daily basis'.<sup>4</sup>

The street traders now expected very little from the new régime and symbolic gestures by the ERC, such as amnesties for fines against street traders on the anniversary of the birth of the Republic, were greeted with derision. The vendors had been hounded and criminalised by authorities who 'robbed' them of their goods for doing little more than attempting to eke out a living under circumstances that were neither of their own choosing nor making. In the course of this experience the street traders met with the new Republican police forces which they regarded as repressive as those which had existed in the days of the monarchy.<sup>5</sup>

Social polarisation was similarly exacerbated by the repression of the rent strike as strikers vented their wrath on 'enemies' like bailiffs and removal men, as well as more obvious ones, like landlords. The ardour of the CDE was tempered under the heat of repression and activists warned that 'rather than sleep on the streets, we are ready for anything'. In Sants, following the reinstallation of an evicted family, neighbours protested at the house of the landlord, informing him of the dangers of re-eviction. Rent strike pickets responded to growing official repression of the strike with ever-more violent methods and landlords reported being threatened with firearms. Assaults on bailiffs also became more common as this represented the quickest way to halt an eviction. In

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<sup>4</sup> Las Noticias, 10 November, 18 December 1931, 29 August 1935; La Vanguardia, 23 August 1935; Minutes of the l'Hospitalet Council meeting, 1 June 1933 (AHLL)

<sup>5</sup> La Vanguardia, 14 April 1932; Solidaridad Obrera, 8 February 1932

Poblenou a family remained in its flat after the bailiffs were set upon by neighbours and on one occasion bailiffs in l'Hospitalet were in such a hurry to escape angry protesters that they left their lorry behind. Meanwhile, in the explosive Can Tunis *Cases Barates* popular frustration at evictions was directed at the clergy and night-watchmen and police fought to prevent residents from torching the local church, before a lorry load of Civil Guard finally re-imposed order. Although since the promulgation of the *Ley de Defensa de la República* mass involvement in the rent strike had receded in most of Barcelona, the degree of solidarity in working class communities like Poblenou, l'Hospitalet and the *Cases Barates* meant that the security forces had to get increasingly involved and evictions were effected in military-style operations. Moreover, in areas such as the *Cases Barates* and in parts of l'Hospitalet, the mix of intense community solidarity and high levels of poverty meant that the hardships imposed through continuing the strike were offset by non-payment. Thus often in the face of unrelenting police harassment and with no electricity or water, many strikers refused to yield to the authorities and the landlords.<sup>6</sup>

The deployment of the security forces against the mobilisations of the unemployed heralded the failure of the Republican project to end the internecine warfare between state institutions and civil society. Moreover, as the police were called upon to contain the illegality of the unemployed, so the hopes of the Republicans to endow the security forces with popular legitimacy were further dashed. From their arrival on the streets of Barcelona, the repressive activities of the *Asaltos* in labour disputes and against the unemployed showed how Republican institutions were used against the masses and led to a growing identification of the Republic with the propertied classes. Meanwhile, because the *Asaltos* were forged from the same material as previous security forces, their failure to change popular perceptions of the police was to a large extent sealed. To be sure, just as the *Asaltos* continued to display the same lack of professionalism of the monarchical police, so did they also employ the same arbitrary violence. In the dark of the night a group of *Asaltos* startled by a backfiring car, shot a

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<sup>6</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15-19, 28 August 1931, 17 September 1935; *Las Noticias*, 30 June 1931; *Las Noticias*, 11, 22 October, 29 November 1931; *El Día Gráfico*, 2 October 1931; *Adelante*, 7 January 1934

night-watchman dead. The new force also displayed a violent indiscipline and *cenetistas* regularly protested about the unwanted 'boxing lessons' that they received in police stations from the *Asaltos*. Off-duty the Republican police displayed a similar lack of discipline, as testified by complaints of violent, drunken behaviour by *Asaltos* during their spare time. Other branches of the Republican repressive forces revealed a similar brutishness, such as the policeman who had a taxi-driven night out around the cabarets of Barcelona, before pulling his revolver on the driver in an attempt to avoid paying the fare.<sup>7</sup>

The personal failings of individual policemen cannot, however, explain the inability of the security forces to win the hearts and minds of proletarian Barcelona. Instead, this owed more to the enduring nature of popular anti-police traditions and the tensions created by the economic crisis. This was tacitly recognised by the authorities themselves, whose attempts at strengthening the police, the 'clean-up' of the Barri xino and re-establishing 'the principle of authority' were necessary complements to continuing economic inequality. The same was true of the *Ley de Defensa de la República* which, according to Azaña, although it produced 'excesses', was 'necessary to govern'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the Republican criminal code was overwhelmingly concerned with the 'legality' of contract and the defence of private property and safeguarded the same historically specific set of socio-economic relationships as the laws of the monarchy. In other words, although the Republican state was clearly distinct to its monarchist predecessor, the commitment of the new authorities to underwriting the highly exploitative, underdeveloped economic system that had developed during the years of the monarchy was inimical to their political project of democratisation and creating popular state institutions.

It was the institutional function of the security forces as defenders of the general cohesion of bourgeois society that largely determined police tactics and poisoned relations between the repressive forces of the state and the workers of Barcelona in

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<sup>7</sup> Ballbé, *Orden público*, p.339; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 December 1932, 8 February, 21 March, 20 June, 15 November 1933; *El Luchador*, 27 November 1931; *L'Opinió*, 29 July 1931

<sup>8</sup> Azaña, *Obras*, vol.2, pp.106-107



much the same way as under the monarchy. Moreover, the growing demands placed on the police as the front-line shock-force of the state in the worker districts was aggravated by the strains of the recession.

Firstly, there was the rise in conflicts between the police and the unemployed derived from the daily threat to property posed by popular illegality. As the security forces proved incapable of protecting private property against conventional acts of illegality by the unemployed, the authorities augmented the civil police with members of the political police. Therefore, members of the Brigada de Investigación Social, the branch of the security forces normally used in the repression of political enemies of the state, were ordered to patrol country roads against highway robbers.<sup>9</sup> This interchangeability of 'civil' and 'political' police functions, a common feature of law-and-order under the monarchy, therefore continued into the Republic and heightened the tendency of the masses to regard the police *per se* as the advanced guard of the capitalist order.

Secondly, the recession enhanced the reliance of the authorities on the security forces and the penal system to impose social discipline on workers who were no longer subjected to the indirect fetters of the workplace and the informal coercion of daily responsibilities of work.<sup>10</sup> The police responded to this additional function with 'preventive brutality' against the unemployed. Throughout the Republic laconic policemen preferred to open fire on suspects rather than set off in their pursuit. The Civil Guard patrolling the fields around l'Hospitalet had a reputation for shooting chicken and vegetable thieves on sight. The newly formed security corps on the port also tended to shoot first and ask questions later. When a gang of jobless workers was disturbed stealing merchandise on the docks, one of the group was summarily shot in the back when he attempted to flee. Another of the port security corps mistook two unemployed workers fishing on the waterfront as robbers and opened fire, killing one, whereupon his outraged friend overpowered the guard and clubbed him to death. Meanwhile, the

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<sup>9</sup> Las Noticias, 31 December 1931

<sup>10</sup> Ivan Janovic, 'Labour Market and Imprisonment', Crime and Social Justice, 1977, pp.17-31; Richard Quinney, Class, State and Crime, New York, 1977, pp.131-140

Sometent, the 'terror of both town and country' in the view of Solidaridad Obrera, continued to claim working class lives with impunity during the Republic.<sup>11</sup>

Brutality was also meted to unemployed workers irrespective of whether they were involved in illegality or, in urban protest movements. Although not listed as an offence by the legal code, police sought to neutralise aspects of what they perceived as very threatening features of working class street culture. In circumstances where police officers felt what they described as an 'insubordinate attitude' was in need of correction, they had no qualms about administering a salutary beating. For instance, without the slightest hint of remorse, the Guàrdia Urbana in l'Hospitalet candidly reported to the Mayor that they had given 'hospital treatment' to two workers who were 'being insolent' towards the authorities. On another occasion, two workers 'larking about' who mocked a bourgeois on a bicycle on Montjuïc were assaulted by a pair of Civil Guards.<sup>12</sup> This extra-legal violence was left unchecked by the authorities and served to embitter the daily battle between police and jobless in working class communities.

The only places where the Republican authorities could claim success in improving the standing of the police were areas like the Eixample and Gràcia. In districts such as these, where the ERC and the other Republican parties had an organised popular base, the more economically stable inhabitants accepted the need for a 'Republic of Order' and had enormous faith in the intentions of the new authorities.

However, life in these areas contrasted enormously from the myriad hardships in the ghettos. On the streets of districts like l'Hospitalet, Santa Coloma and Horta there was an uninterrupted street war between unemployed workers who, by the very conditions of their physical existence, were forced to live outside the law. This is confirmed by police reports in l'Hospitalet, 'the most explosive district' in Catalonia in the view of García Oliver, which reveal a constant struggle by both the police and night-watchmen to prevent the theft of foodstuffs from nearby estates and break-ins at flats and houses in the bourgeois city centre. In these ghetto areas, the accumulated

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<sup>11</sup> La Vanguardia, 11 September 1931; Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 22 June 1934 (AHLL); Solidaridad Obrera, 21 September 1932, 6 April, 20 August 1933

<sup>12</sup> L'Opinió, 29 July 1931; Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 26 April 1936 (AHLL); Solidaridad Obrera, 19 June 1931

experiences of a section of the proletariat as the policed encouraged a distinct cultural outlook on matters of law-and-order and perpetuated the popular view of the security forces as the repressive agents of an invidious and unequal system. This was confirmed by the lamentations of La Vanguardia, that the bulk of *Barcelonins* felt a 'general disrespect' towards the uniformed representatives of the law.<sup>13</sup> The stubborn and venomous nature of this 'disrespect' was reflected in mass resistance to all branches of the security forces. Whenever the police attempted to make arrests hostile crowds of locals frequently formed in an attempt to thwart the security forces. It was immaterial whether the crowds knew the detainee or, for that matter, why the police wanted to make the detention: what mattered was the popular perception that 'one of us' was under attack from 'one of them', victimised by the same oppressive forces which preserved the hostile world within which the proletariat as a whole was trapped.

In response to collective resistance, police tactics became more robust. In the La Torrassa-Collblanc zone of l'Hospitalet, police operations came to resemble the manoeuvres of a foreign army of occupation in hostile enemy territory. These innovations merely exacerbated the existing alienation felt towards the force and inflamed community reactions even more. One police report explained that after an *Asalto* hit a felon while making an arrest, the agent was surrounded by an aggressive crowd whose mood was so incensed that the Civil Guard and the police were forced to intervene speedily, 'otherwise things would have turned very nasty'. On the tough streets of l'Hospitalet beat policemen sometimes received written death-threats and, when the odds favoured those who did not have the law on their side, especially under the cover of night, workers had no hesitation in administering a thrashing to both policemen or private security guards, whether on or off duty.<sup>14</sup>

Policing in the Barri xino produced similar patterns of popular resistance. The threat of arrest, illegal detention and even false prosecution in police *ràtzies* prompted enormous opposition to the extending arm of the law. Similarly, Council repatriation

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<sup>13</sup> La Vanguardia, 1 September 1931; García Oliver, El eco, p.416

<sup>14</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 24 December 1931; Communiques from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 17 July 1932, 18 March, 14 June 1936 (AHLI)

policies engendered tremendous hostility from immigrants, both non-Spanish and non-Catalan. Throughout the Republic there were numerous reports of 'the mob' ('la chusma') violently impeding police duties in the Barri xino and intervening to prevent the arrest of 'common criminals'. Moreover, because the popular hatred towards policing was common knowledge, there were frequent cases of detainees resisting arrest and imploring passers-by to intercede on their behalf against the security forces. On one such occasion, in Carrer del Cid, in the heart of the Barri xino, an individual with what the police termed a 'bad record' noisily resisted arrest, prompting a speedy response from residents of the neighbouring flats, who left their tenement blocks to attack the police and free the wanted party, while other neighbours bombarded the intruding security forces with bottles, cans and rocks from their balconies. In the end, the security forces fired shots in the air to effect the arrest.<sup>15</sup>

In moments of community tension the arrival of the police on the streets produced highly flammable situations. For instance, when a tram crashed into a group of children in Barceloneta, neighbours immediately took to the streets, calling on the authorities for the trams to be replaced with buses. Despite assurances from Jove i Sarroca, the USC Councillor, that the demands of the demonstrators would be raised with the Council if they went home peacefully, the crowd continued to block the tram lines. Finally, when the police were called in to disperse the crowd, the mass disapprobation for the security forces prompted what La Vanguardia described as a 'popular uprising' (*motín popular*) as demonstrators challenged police for the control of their area, successfully driving them out of Barceloneta. Rather than await the ponderous decision of the authorities, the people of Barceloneta chose to end the danger to their children immediately through a collective riot, ripping up tram lines before a substantial contingent of *Asaltos* arrived to re-impose order.<sup>16</sup>

The battle for the streets between the police and the masses underlined the disintegration of 'the people', the ephemeral political reality that had ensured the peaceful transition to the Republic in the spring of 1931. Although 'the people' was always devoid

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<sup>15</sup> Las Noticias, 9, 16 May, 24 December 1931; La Vanguardia, 9 September 1931

<sup>16</sup> La Vanguardia and Solidaridad Obrera, 21 July 1931

of any real socio-economic basis, it rapidly fragmented as 1931 wore on. Now, more than ever, there was a growing confrontation between what the Bloc termed the 'two Barcelonas'.<sup>17</sup> Symptomatic of the divergent agendas of the Republican authorities and the working class was the official reaction to an outbreak of bubonic plague near the city rubbish tip in l'Hospitalet at the end of the summer of 1931. Despite this crisis which threatened the lives of thousands of workers and the daily evidence of the huge pestilent cloud that hung over l'Hospitalet and Barcelona, the authorities downplayed the danger to public health and Aiguader i Miró defended the 'perfect' health bodies in what were 'the cleanest cities in the world'.<sup>18</sup> The cavalier attitude of the authorities towards the plague contrasted sharply with the concurrent barrage of press complaints about 'licentiousness' and 'evil-doers'.

As we have seen, joblessness was the decisive factor that sharpened conflict between the constituent parts of 'the people', because the open wounds of unemployment pushed the most depressed sections of the proletariat to clash directly with the interests of the petit bourgeoisie and then physically, in the streets, with Republican security forces. From promising real change, the authorities moved to embrace the 'rule of law'. This presupposed the reaffirmation of the status of the proletariat as a propertyless class, leaving many workers feeling betrayed and aware that the post-monarchical stress on legal equality was little more than a mask for the preservation of the law of the rich.

The unfulfilled aspirations aroused by Republicans among the masses were translated into hatred for the new authorities. As the Badalona CNT put it, tired of 'words, words and promises...the immense majority of the working class felt completely defrauded'. In l'Hospitalet, unemployed workers reminded the Council that they had 'trusted their warm words', while others had 'risked their freedom, even their lives, so that a government which would realise their hopes might come to power.

Disillusionment is a bad adviser and it may create enemies'.<sup>19</sup> The repeated failure of the

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<sup>17</sup> Front, 30 July 1932

<sup>18</sup> L'Opinió, 29 August, 1 September 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 6, 13 September 1931; La Vanguardia, 30 August 1931; L'Obra, 26 September 1931; Claramunt i Furest, La pesta, *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> La Colmena Obrera, 30 October 1931; Letter from la Comisión de Obreros en paro forzoso to l'Hospitalet Council, 22 October 1931 (AHLL). The disaffection with the failure of the authorities to help the large numbers of unemployed in l'Hospitalet cannot be separated from a dismal turnout in the

Page 291 line 21	For "a authentic" read "an authentic"
Page 293 line 27	For "accursed" read "cursed"
Page 297 line 1	For "around, busy city streets" read "around busy city streets"
Page 312 line 26	For "exorbitant" read "exorbitantly expensive"
Page 323 line 6	For "some" read "sum"
Page 323 line 13	Delete "this solution"
Page 323 line 20	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 333 line 11	For "woodworker's" read "woodworkers"
Page 348 line 17	For "win" read "winning"
Page 351 line 14	For "corporal" read corporeal"
Page 372 line 8	For "paved" read "paled"
Page 382 line 10	For "floundered" read "foundered"
Page 392 line 5	For "if" read "of"
Page 401 line 19	For "Nitzschean" read "Nietzschean"
Page 409 line 22	For "owed to" read "owed most to"
Page 417 line 1	For "guarantied" read "guaranteed"
Page 419 line 6	For "warned that the anarchists" read "warned the anarchists"

authorities to deliver on their earlier promises to assist the unemployed led the jobless to direct their frustration squarely towards the Republicans. Ángel Samblancat, one of the Councillors responsible for unemployment relief in Barcelona, faced the growing rage of the unemployed during a visit to the soup kitchens in the *Can Tunis Cases Barates*. His arrival provoked a mass riot, as the predominantly jobless inhabitants of the area stormed the soup kitchens and fought with police. At one stage, guns were brandished, and Samblancat, a veteran of the campaign against the monarchy, ran for his life.<sup>20</sup> Indicative of the changing relationship between the Republican political élite and those who had previously voted for them, in the summer-autumn of 1931 a growing number of politicians applied for gun licences and armed themselves.<sup>21</sup>

The experience of the first months of the Republic convinced large numbers of workers in Barcelona that the law, like that of the monarchy before it, was the law of the well-fed minority bent on protecting its property from those who had none. The ease with which the bourgeoisie and the middle classes found the ear of the new authorities, along with continuing economic inequality, confirmed the prognosis of the revolutionary left that the formal legal and political equality introduced by the Republic were pyrrhic advances. In the view of one anarchist critic, 'converted into the first Government of the bourgeois Republic, the Revolutionary Committee quickly forgot its agreements and the mission which the people had entrusted it by voting for it'. This view was shared by the dissident communists, who maintained that the new democracy was a 'fiction' and that the Republicans stood for 'class democracy in favour of the bourgeoisie'. By adopting a conservative line in a society where there was precious little to conserve and everything to transform, the Republicans were accused of turning their backs on the working class, the social sector that represented the main guarantee against reaction.<sup>22</sup>

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city in the June Cortes elections, out of step with the large poll in Barcelona: *La Vanguardia*, 14 July 1931

<sup>20</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 June 1931; *Las Noticias*, 11-12 June 1931. When he returned to his office that day in an understandably shaken state, Samblancat duly resigned from his post on the unlikely grounds of 'press pressure'.

<sup>21</sup> *Jefatura Superior de Policía de Barcelona to the Juzgado Municipal de l'Hospitalet*, 28 September, 25 October 1931 (AHLL); *Gobierno Civil de Barcelona to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 20 April, 1 May, 1 June 1932 (AHLL)

<sup>22</sup> Cánovas Cervantes, *Apuntes*, p.269; *La Batalla*, 12 March 1931

The real possibilities of attracting sectors of the CNT rank-and-file in Barcelona in the first three or four months of the Republic had passed. The social fissures produced by the economic crisis fragmented the cross-class coalition that brought the Republic in Barcelona and the authorities embarked on a policy of repressing the unemployed. To assuage the fears of sections of its own political constituency and to satisfy the central authorities that it was a responsible force of government, the Esquerra moved to the right and accepted the need to curb the actions of the poorest sectors of Catalan society. The stage was set for a full-scale clash between the ERC and the CNT.

## 5.2. The Rise of the FAI

The CNT was the vehicle for the frustrated hopes for radical change among the unemployed. The immigrant workers who found themselves excluded from the semi-statal, gradualist bodies like the Generalitat Unemployed Workers' Commission, flooded into the CNT *bolsas de trabajo*. By early summer 1931, when the average unemployment rate in the Barcelona CNT unions was 13%, the Woodworkers' union claimed that 42% of its members were jobless. In May 1931 the unemployed street vendors formed the Society of Street Traders in Fish, Vegetable and Fruit as a section of the Barcelona CNT Food Workers' Union. Radicalised by the 'tenacious persecution' of their 'humble trade' and 'struggle for life', the street traders attacked the plan of the authorities 'to move us from the streets to the hospitals'.<sup>23</sup> Solidaridad Obrera defended the 'honest way of life' of the street traders, alleging that they had moral and commercial superiority over the shopkeepers. The embrace of the street traders by the CNT, reflected how the Confederation was prepared to articulate the aspirations of those social forces which were treated with derision by the authorities, who feared them as dark, ignorant masses. Indeed, the CNT press berated the criminalisation of the popular practices of the jobless and reflected that 'under the Republic a new criminal type has

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<sup>23</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 20 May, 7, 23 June, 22 July, 13, 21, 26 August, 28-30 October 1931, 15 February, 22 March 1932; La Vanguardia, 5 March 1932; Las Noticias, 17 November 1931; El Día Gráfico, 20, 26 November 1931; La Publicitat, 10 January 1932. The growing activism of the street traders mirrored that of the costers, the rough equivalent to the street traders in nineteenth century Britain, who had a similar hatred of the police and a history of social agitation in the Chartist movement: Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, London, 1851, vol.1, p.22.



been invented: any worker who is unemployed and wishes to work to bring some bread to his children must be imprisoned for public disorder' or face attack from the *Asaltos*, 'the sociologists with rubber truncheons'<sup>24</sup>

Battle-hardened by their experiences of the first few months of the Republic, the street vendors altered the disposition of the CNT towards the Republic, presaging new conflicts between the Confederation and the authorities. Rather than passively 'condemn many proletarian families to death' the street traders pointed out that if the Republic continued to pursue them 'like criminals' and 'alien dogs' (*perros forasteros*), they would be forced to turn to 'criminality' as 'the only way to procure our daily sustenance'. The disappointment with the new order was summed up by the l'Hospitalet CNT Society of Street Traders, who maintained that 'the transition from monarchy to Republic was nothing more than a change in names and personnel, while the procedures, ambience and mentalities of the authorities have remained the same'.<sup>25</sup>

Similar anti-Republican sentiments were provoked by the rent strike. Disgruntled at the repression of its mobilisations, the CDE warned that 'if the Republic doesn't favour the people, because it is more interested in defending capitalism, we, the children of the people, will defend our brothers against Republican interests of reactionary stock'. In its self-defence, the CDE argued that:

'this Commission has committed no greater crime than to lead the spirited defence of the economic interests of the wage-earning population. To this end, it has unmasked the rackets and fiddles of the landlords, of the shopkeepers and, of the bourgeoisie. It has placed the whole population of Barcelona and its environs in a state of effervescence. It has stirred up public emotions and placed the people who make others rich in a position of strength against their exploiters'.

A protest movement for the release of Bilbao, one of the founders of the CDE interned without trial, culminated in a mass rally of 5,000 workers on Montjuïc at which Durruti, García Oliver and Tomás Cano Ruiz all launched sustained attacks on the anti-worker policies of the Republican government and its defence of the 'oligarchy of the landlords'.

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<sup>24</sup> *Cultura Libertaria*, 1 January 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 March 1933, 21 September 1935, 9 February 1936

<sup>25</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 October, 1 December 1931, 24 November 1932, 3 February 1933

Heralding the possibility of a complete rupture between the unions and the Republic, Durruti pledged the CNT to defend the 'just and humane rights of the proletarians in the face of the tyranny of power'.<sup>26</sup>

The growing anti-Republicanism engendered by the struggles in the early second half of 1931 provided the wider context within which the FAI strengthened its position within the Barcelona CNT as part of its desired goal of *trabazón*. It is certainly no exaggeration to state that the FAI rode on the crest of the wave of the myriad discontents of the unskilled, unemployed and immigrant proletariat. The Builders' Union office on Carrer de Mercaders, the focal-point for the *faístas* returning from exile and jail after April 1931, was also the unofficial headquarters of the CDE and by the beginning of July, the listings of CDE meetings were like a 'Who's Who' of the Barcelona FAI, with Ricardo Sanz, Cano Ruíz, García Oliver, José Xena, Durruti and Francisco Ascaso all regularly addressing rent strike meetings. A wave of *faístas* earned their spurs in the rent strike, going on to establish themselves as active militants in the Barcelona CNT. Parera joined the Catalan Regional Committee, while Bautista Castillo Guimero succeeded Sanz as president of the Builders' Union. Other anarchists, like 'The Three Musketeers', García Oliver, Francisco Ascaso and Durruti, who were previously barely known in the city, now enjoyed a new standing within the CNT and emerged as 'the three fundamental feet of the colossus' of the FAI. Meanwhile, in the view of many *cenetistas*, García Oliver established a reputation as a better speaker than Seguí. Their new credibility saw the expansion of the 'Nosotros' group of García Oliver, Francisco Ascaso and Durruti, which attracted new members such as Adolfo Ballano Bueno and Antonio Ortiz Carpintero from the CNT Wood Workers' Union. The rent strike also provided an opportunity for new contacts between the previously dispersed anarchist *grupos de afinidad*. This was particularly the case in Barceloneta, the La Torrassa-Collblanc zone of l'Hospitalet, and

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<sup>26</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 June, 2, 12, 19 August, 1, 3 September 1931; *El Luchador*, 4 September 1931; *Tierra y Libertad*, 11 July 1931

in the various groups of *Cases Barates*, all of which became solid bastions of the FAI, who produced its weekly paper, Tierra y Libertad, from the Horta group.<sup>27</sup>

The turbulence of the unemployed struggles facilitated growing criticisms of the quietism of the CNT leadership on the question of the jobless, particularly from the FAI-controlled Builders' Union. These criticisms were not unfounded. The CNT leadership refused to take a resolute lead and the issue of joblessness did not figure as a big issue at the regional congresses and conferences it organised in the summer of 1931. In fact, apart from a propaganda drive aimed at the estimated several thousand workers who had dual employment at a time when many had none and general overtures that 'the cause of the unemployed is the cause of all workers', the anarcho-syndicalists were far more concerned with organising those still at work. Meanwhile, when they did show an interest in the question of unemployment, they veered towards reactionary positions, including the adoption of immigration controls and 'the abolition of women's labour as relief against unemployment'. Pestaña, increasingly seen as the embodiment of reformism in the CNT, participated as an observer at the notorious gathering of the Generalitat Unemployed Workers' Commission that resolved to repatriate the non-Catalan unemployed.<sup>28</sup>

All the reservations of the radical anarchists about the CNT leadership crystallised around the view that they were not making a sufficiently energetic protest against the growing harassment of the jobless. The FAI was well placed to tap this discontent, not least because its apolitical discourse was immediately understandable to the majority of *cenetistas*, who had been schooled in the language of anarcho-syndicalism. The wider political context also favoured the FAI. In general terms, in 1931, like after World War One, it was obvious that the barriers placed by the authorities in front of the CNT favoured the ascendancy of the radical anarchists. The anarchists, meanwhile, employed sleight of hand in the election of Congress delegates. For example, although a waiter,

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<sup>27</sup> García Oliver, El eco, p.115; Solidaridad Obrera, 6, 10 July 1931, 13 October 1933; La Vanguardia, 27 June, 4, 7 July 1931, 6 April 1933; Sanz, El sindicalismo y la política, pp.200-204; Tierra y Libertad, 25 July 1931; Rider, 'The practice of direct action', in Goodway (ed.), p.105, n.72

<sup>28</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 22 April, 5, 10, 22, 29 May, 2 June, 11, 14 July, 2, 11 August 1931; Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 29 November 1931, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Salamanca (AHN); Las Noticias, 1 May 1931

García Oliver attended the June 1931 CNT National Conference as representative of the Barcelona Wood Workers' Union. Similarly, Urales attended CNT Conferences as delegate for a fictional Land workers' Union from the Andalusian province of Córdoba. Following communist and anarcho-syndicalist criticisms of the growing intervention of Urales in the CNT, a minuscule Union of the Liberal Professions was formed, which quickly became his exclusive fief and a prominent weapon in the FAI crusade to assert its hegemony over the Confederation. These administrative irregularities were accompanied by a campaign of physical abuse directed by *faístas* against their rivals, which was responsible for an increasing number of 'regrettable incidents' that began to occur at CNT assemblies.<sup>29</sup>

However, for all their considerable chicanery, it is an oversimplification to claim that the FAI seized power of the CNT unions. Indeed, more than anything, it was the repressive turn of the Republic that pulled the initiative away from the anarcho-syndicalist leadership. This was reflected in the way complaints about specific repressive government figures gave way to more generalised criticisms of the régime from the union rank-and-file. Increasingly, therefore, the *cenetistas* believed that the Republic confirmed the anarchist orthodoxy that the constituted legal power, irrespective of its outward characteristics, was always an anti-proletarian force, the protector of the privileged classes.

The ascendancy of the anarchist supporters of *trabazón* in the Confederal Defence Committees and the Prisoners' Support Committees grew alongside the repression, as did the libertarian criticisms of both the CNT leadership and the 'Mussolini-type methods' and 'white terror of the Republic'. The Prisoners' Support Committee damned the police measures of the *Ley de Defensa de la República* and applauded the popular hatred of security forces whose 'mission was, is and will continue to be the persecution of workers and the humble'. A number of *faístas*, including

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<sup>29</sup> Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.2, pp.35-54; García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.115, 216; CNT, *Memoria del Congreso Extraordinario celebrado en Madrid los días 11 al 16 de junio de 1931*, Barcelona 1932, especially pp. 25, 74-76, 84-85, 195-198; CRT, *Memoria del Pleno Regional de Sindicatos Únicos de Cataluña. Celebrado en Barcelona del 5 al 15 de marzo de 1933*, Barcelona, 1933, p.31; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3, 5 August 1931, 21 June 1933

Francisco Ascaso, received first hand knowledge of the brutality of the Republican police. Meanwhile, the Italian anarchist refugees of the Italian Anarchist Group (Gruppo Anarchico Italiano), affiliated to Barcelona FAI, and the International Refugees Support Committee (Comité pro-perseguidos internacional), formed in the Catalan capital to support anarchist exiles, reviled the repatriation policies of the 'comic democracy'. The most emotive issue for the anarchists and the Prisoners' Support Committee was the return of the *quintzenes* and internment without trial, which they denounced as the 'monarchical technique' of decapitating 'the rebellion of the CNT'. In response, the Prisoners' Support Committee raised its attack on what it accused as a government of 'a few men who, from the positions of power and the police headquarters, have declared a war to the death on all workers'. Similarly, at a Prisoners' Support Committee rally, Parera accused the authorities of backing the same economic interests as the monarchy, while Durruti told the audience that the choice for the proletariat was stark: either social-fascism or libertarian revolution.<sup>30</sup>

Mounting disgust at the fate of those interned without trial reached a peak at the end of August when independent medical opinion confirmed that *cenetistas* in the Model jail had been beaten by police. 50 internees in the jail responded with a hunger strike under the slogan 'Freedom or death'. Amid rising tension, and despite warnings that his presence would be regarded by prisoners as a provocation, the Civil Governor Anguera de Sojo decided to visit the prison on September 2. The arrival of the main mover in the recrudescence of internment without trial sparked off a protest riot by the detainees. When the Civil Guard was called in events quickly escalated and the noise of fighting in the jail alarmed relatives and workers outside in the surrounding streets. Meanwhile, worker-delegations toured nearby workshops and news rapidly spread that a number of prisoners had been killed in the jail. In a spontaneous gesture the Barcelona CNT ordered a protest strike against internment without trial to which an estimated 300,000 workers responded.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 19 April, 23 August, 1-2, 9, 17, 29 September, 6 October, 3, 8, 10, 26, 28 November 1931, 5 November 1932; CNT, *Memoria del Congreso...de junio de 1931*, p.219; *Tierra y Libertad*, 13, 27 June, 5 December 1931; *El Luchador*, 9 October, 20 November 1931

<sup>31</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 July, 29 August, 3 September, 10 November 1931

The FAI now saw the moment it had been waiting for to test the insurrectionary waters in the Catalan capital. Calling for a 'nation-wide revolutionary general strike for the triumph of anarchist communism', the FAI ordered its *grupos* onto the streets, along with the armed squads from the Confederal Defence Committees and the Prisoners' Support Committees. Barricades were erected in Collblanc in l'Hospitalet, Sant Andreu and in parts of the Gothic quarter and the Catalan capital was paralysed for 72 hours. The middle classes responded with panic and food stocks were quickly sold out. The strike also spread to the outlying towns of Granollers, Manresa, Mataró, Sabadell and Terrassa. However, this was not an auspicious baptism of fire for the FAI *grupos* and the Confederal Defence Committees, who engaged the security forces in nothing more than sporadic guerrilla actions. The Madrid authorities ordered that two naval warships be moored in the port and the last pockets of armed resistance were mopped up by Civil Guard cavalry. Meanwhile, martial law was declared, under the cover of which the police used the 'ley de fugas' to kill three workers, leaving another five wounded. The final death toll was 16 *grupistas* dead, six seriously wounded and 300 detained, around half of whom were interned on prison ships in the harbour.<sup>32</sup>

The repercussions of the September events were most heavily registered inside the CNT, rather than on the streets of Barcelona. In the aftermath of the street confrontations the balance of forces between the FAI and the moderate leadership were altered irrevocably. The general strike coincided with the release of the so-called 'Treintista manifesto' issued by thirty leading anti-FAI *cenetistas* opposed to *trabazón* and what they saw as an 'audacious minority' that propagated the 'myth of revolution' through 'the violent deed'. These *treintistas*, predominantly older anarcho-syndicalists headed by Peiró and Pestaña, lamented the disintegration and radicalisation of the social situation, both of which they regarded as the work of the FAI. Although the *treintistas* retained revolutionary objectives, their short term objective was for an armistice with the

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<sup>32</sup> *La Vanguardia* and *L'Opinió*, 3-9 September 1931; *La Calle*, 11, 25 September 1931; *Tierra y Libertad*, 5, 12, 19 September 1931; *El Luchador*, 25 September, 2, 9 October 1931; *La Batalla*, 10, 17 September 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p.227; FO371/15775/W10124/46/41, FO371/15775/W10194/46/41, FO371/15775/W10335/46/41 and FO371/15775/W10541/46/41: Letters from Sir G. Grahame, 5, 7 and 11 September 1931 (PRO)

authorities that would allow the open and legal organisation of Confederal institutions.<sup>33</sup>

Given the march of events, the hopes of the *treintistas* were naïve in the extreme. It was increasingly obvious that the defence of the socio-economic interests of the CNT membership promised a full-scale clash with the electoral constituency of many Republican parties. Moreover, prescriptive legislation such as that enacted by Largo Caballero and the *Ley de Defensa de la República* criminalised a series of traditional CNT practises and made confrontation with the new régime inevitable. The assault on the CNT was so great that one delegate from the Barcelona Local Federation complained that after six months of Republican rule all conventional syndical activity was effectively 'useless' because the authorities 'don't allow us to act at all'.<sup>34</sup>

The rarefied atmosphere provided by the repression of the September general strike created a climate that inhibited the reasoned discussion of the *treintista* manifesto. Equally, the many voices that favoured a middle road between the polarities of *faísmo* and *treintismo* were drowned out. Typical of its over-confident zealotry, there was not even passing discussion of the *treintista* manifesto inside the FAI. Instead, the militant anarchists seized on the document as a 'whipping-boy' and showed a particular knack for directing rank-and-file attention away from their own tactical limitations by launching hysterical attacks on its sacrificial enemies within the CNT.<sup>35</sup>

The ideological onslaught against the *treintistas* was carried out with enormous aplomb by the vituperative Urales and his daughter, Federica Montseny, the Pied Piper and Lady Macbeth of the young anarchist malcontents respectively. Urales and Montseny sustained a vitriolic offensive against all enemies of the FAI, anarcho-syndicalist and the dissident communist alike and both real and imagined, from the pages of the weekly El Luchador and the bi-monthly La Revista Blanca. Interestingly, for all their professed understanding of the sentiments of the Confederation, neither of these individualistic, middle-class intellectuals were actually members of the CNT or the FAI

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<sup>33</sup> Bueso, Recuerdos, vol.2, pp.349-353; L'Opinió, 30 August 1931

<sup>34</sup> Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 24 October 1931 (AHN)

<sup>35</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 5 March, 14 July, 3, 6 September 1931

at the time. Instead, it was largely due to their press ownership, particularly La Revista Blanca, the flag-ship of Iberian anarchism, that the Urales family intervened directly in the Confederal movement. However, these anarchist press barons had a highly ambivalent relationship with organised labour. During the monarchy, the anti-syndicalism of the Urales family earned Federico a ban in some CNT centres and on one embarrassing occasion he was physically ejected from a union office. Meanwhile, during the Republic, the Galician CNT alleged that the divisive labour of the Urales family did more damage to the unions than the Civil Guard. The difficulties experienced by the Urales family in the unions highlighted the uncomfortable *modus vivendi* between the Spanish libertarian movement and intellectuals. This was also reflected in the attitudes of Montseny, who sometimes displayed a prejudiced and disdainful view of the masses. Indeed, like the middle class Republicans, Montseny believed that 'the people are like children...they have the candour and the primitive instinct of infancy...the collective condition of the eternal child'.<sup>36</sup>

In the aftermath of the September general strike the anarchists launched 'the final assault' on the centres of Confederal power. The *faístas* and their supporters tirelessly inveighed against the 'betrayal' of the strike by the 'bourgeois' CNT leadership who, it was alleged, 'sold-out' the 'revolutionary struggle' at 'the decisive moment' through its pact with the ERC. Overcome by events, instead of holding their ground and answering their detractors, the *treintistas* capitulated in the face of the rebellion of the radicalised Barcelona unions and they resigned a number of key positions to their radical opponents in September, including the editorial board of Solidaridad Obrera. The following month at the Regional CNT Plenum in Barcelona a new *faísta* editorial board was elected, with Felipe Alaíz as editor, assisted by Alberola, Cano Ruíz, Liberto Callejas, Eusebi Carbó, García Oliver and Montseny.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> El Luchador, 8 May, 11 December 1931, 19 February, 18 March, 1 April 1932; García Oliver, El eco, pp.215-216; Teresa Abelló and Enric Olivé, 'El conflicto entre la CNT y la Familia Urales-Montseny en 1928. La lucha por el mantenimiento del anarquismo puro', Estudios de Historia Social, 32-33, 1985, pp.317-332

<sup>37</sup> Ysern Lagarda, El moviment obrer, p.94; Solidaridad Obrera, 22-24 September, 14, 21 October 1931; El Luchador, 23 October 1931; García Oliver, El eco, p.216. The most thorough works on this question are Vega i Massana's, El Trentisme and La Confederació



From autumn 1931 onwards, the *treintistas* were in a clear minority in the Barcelona CNT. Meanwhile, although the *faístas* claimed no more than 2,000 activists throughout Spain<sup>38</sup>, they were concentrated in Barcelona where they were hegemonic in the textile, construction, wood, glass, energy, car and intellectual workers' unions. The Catalan capital, where the CNT claimed over 150,000 members, emerged as the central bastion of *faísmo*, a position that it held for the rest of the Republic. Moreover, because of its specific gravity within the CNT on both a regional and state-wide level, the Catalan capital was crucial to controlling the National and Regional Committees, both of which were based in Barcelona.<sup>39</sup> By early 1932, therefore, *faístas* occupied key posts in the organisation: Jover, Ricardo Sanz and García Oliver were on the National Committee, Francisco Ascaso, José Canela, Patricio Navarro and Ramón Porquet were on the Regional Committee, while Segundo Martínez was secretary of the Barcelona Local Federation. The FAI ascendancy and *trabazón* were effectively assured.

If the hopes of the *treintistas* that the state would not impede the development of mass organisations were ingenuous, so too was the belief of the *faístas* that by throwing a few hundred poorly armed militants into the streets they were either going to produce the revolution or, at a minimum, encourage the authorities to change their tact. Nevertheless, the FAI was unrepentant. Following its 'heroic gesture' in September the *faístas* felt 'sadness' at the 'blood and violence' but, at the same time, 'happiness' at the 'great power of the masses which escapes all control, discipline and everything which smacks of authoritarianism, order, command and leadership'. This triumphalism inspired an impassioned letter from the Italian anarchists exiled in Barcelona who warned the *faístas* against élitism and called on them to appraise past defeats of the revolutionary left, both at home and abroad. This view was echoed by the BOC, who feared that 'anarchist intolerance', conditioned by the long years in which they were unaccustomed

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<sup>38</sup> Josep Maria Huertas Claveria, *Obrers a Catalunya. Manual d'història del moviment obrer (1840-1975)*, Barcelona, 1994, p.243

<sup>39</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 September 1931. Over half of the delegates on the Comité regional were from Barcelona. Overall, Vega i Massana calculates that with 12-17 members on Barcelona's 24 unions, each of which delegated members to the Local Federation, Regional Committee and National Committee, 'in quantitative terms approximately some 500 militants decided the Confederal resolutions in the city of Barcelona, which was the most important centre of anarcho-syndicalism during the Second Republic': *La Confederació*, p.318.

to facing questions from within the labour movement, might provoke a damaging split in the CNT. To prevent this, the dissident communists requested that the FAI reflect on the wider context and advocated the unity of all revolutionary forces, pointing out that 'the revolution is not the property of any single sector of the working class'.<sup>40</sup>

These warnings went unheeded and the rise of the FAI in Barcelona was accompanied by an immense explosion of sectarianism. In the early part of 1931 the anarcho-syndicalists had hoped to win favour with the FAI by hounding communists from the CNT, 'so that the Spanish Revolution does not finish up like the Russian experience'. This led to the adoption of the anti-democratic 'Madrid Agreements' at the May 1931 National CNT Conference. Dubbed 'a labour of social hygiene' by Solidaridad Obrera, 'The Madrid Agreements' strengthened the executive of the CNT to the detriment of grass-roots democracy and prohibited communists from holding union positions irrespective of rank-and-file opinion. The enactment of the 'Madrid Agreements' provided a justification for the disciples of *trabazón* to impose their dogmas on the hitherto heterogeneous CNT and brought into question the position of seasoned union militants like Adolfo Bueso, a dissident communist and leading *cenetista* in the Barcelona Printers' Union and in the regional federation. The witch-hunt against 'communist infiltration' and 'enemy' BOC 'scum' reached new heights. Puente, an influential FAI ideologue, who, incidentally was a physician, and not a trade unionist, asserted that it was 'anachronistic' to have communist workers inside the CNT. This sectarianism led to an inquisitorial cruelty, exemplified by the decision of the Prisoners' Support Committees to withdraw the subsidy paid to the family of a jailed *cenetista* after he was found guilty by the anarchists of being 'in contact with a political party'.<sup>41</sup>

Portents of the exclusiveness of the FAI were seen in the rent strike. There was a growing tendency for speakers to exploit CDE meetings as fora for lauding the spiritual virtues of anarchism. Occasionally, FAI speakers addressed assemblies billed as CDE

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<sup>40</sup> Tierra y Libertad, 8 August, 12 September 1931; La Batalla, 15 August 1930, 7 May, 10 September 1931

<sup>41</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 15 March, 21 April, 17 May, 4-5, 13 June, 13 July, 25 August, 11 September, 20 November, 4, 9 December 1931; CNT, Memoria del Congreso...de junio de 1931, pp.37-45; Trabajo, 15 June 1931; CRT, Memorias...de 1931, pp.111-112; Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 15 May 1932 (AHN)

meetings without making even a passing reference to the rent strike. Moreover, although both the CDE and the rent strike were formally open to all workers irrespective of ideological persuasion, it was clear that the anarchists resented the influence of other sectors of working class opinion within the movement. At a mass CDE rally in July Parera attacked 'the extreme Bolshevik left' and asserted that the aims of the unemployed would only be guaranteed with 'the installation of anarchist communism'. When communists in the audience attempted to answer this rabidly sectarian anti-Marxism fighting broke out among an audience which, like the Barcelona working class, was politically heterogeneous.<sup>42</sup>

The anarchists concealed the nefarious and divisive effects of their sectarianism with an ultra-leftist hyperbole. This maximalism also conditioned the stance of the FAI on the issue of unemployment, which they saw in essentially revolutionary terms. Assuming that capitalism was entering a state of irrevocable collapse and that the proletariat was in a state of revolutionary readiness, the anarchists saw no need to strike a balance between short-term collective measures aimed at lessening the lot of the jobless and the long-term solutions of the social revolution. Instead, the *faístas* focused on the 'final solution' provided by revolution, 'the death of the criminal bourgeoisie' and the destruction of 'an economic order that cannot guarantee a life for all'. The Barcelona Builders' Union, the standard bearer of anarchist unemployment initiatives, advocated 'profoundly revolutionary tactics, concordant with our revolutionary identity'. Accordingly, it was averred that if workers were sacked, 'the struggle has to be pursued to its logical conclusion...up to the seizure of the factories and workshops'.<sup>43</sup>

The anarchists brought all their sectarianism into play against their *bloquista* and *treintista* critics who feared, prophetically as it turned out, that the unemployed might be abandoned before 'the great revolutionary night' that the *faístas* dreamt of. At the August 1931 Catalan CNT Congress the debate on unemployment was eclipsed by FAI anti-communism. A few months later at the Lleida Regional CNT Plenum the question of joblessness was, nevertheless, raised as a 'life or death' issue for the unions. The

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<sup>42</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 11 July 1931

<sup>43</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 February, 2 April, 12, 29 May, 4, 21 July, 7-8, 15, 18, 20 August 1931

resolution passed at Lleida mapped out the organisation of the unemployed in Unemployed Committees (Comités de los obreros sin trabajo) that would be coordinated by a Local Federation. However, this initiative was always secondary to the unrelenting anti-communism of the *faístas*. During a discussion on the organisation of the out-of-work of the Barcelona Local Federation, the FAI delegate from the Metal Workers' Union opposed the formation of an Unemployed Committee in his industry because of the influence of 'those who advocate the formation of the United Front [i.e. the BOC]' among the jobless and on the grounds that a number of the existing jobless committees were 'completely communist'. In reply, the textile workers delegate called for a purge of *bloquistas* and the increased policing of all union committees, pointing out that 'it is essential that the control and posts are in the hands of our comrades and that we know their history in the organisation'. For the anarchists then, it was preferable to leave the unemployed unorganised, rather than see them fall under the sway of rival CNT factions. Consequently, they ignored all the initiatives of their *bloquista* and *treintista* rivals in the CNT, irrespective of the effect this had on the overall morale of the unemployed.<sup>44</sup>

Belligerently interventionist, the *faístas* sought to impose their orthodoxy on all the heretics in the CNT. A case study of the overbearing attitude of the Barcelona anarchists can be seen in their dogmatic rejection of any campaign aimed to furnish the jobless with a subsidy or public works. Such a course was rejected by the FAI as 'charity and illusory palliatives', 'immoral measures', tantamount to begging from the state. This maximalism had disastrous effects in Badalona, where the CNT devised a counter-crisis project. This initiative was based on a public works plan for the infrastructural development of Badalona, including public hygiene reforms, a river control programme, the beautification of the city and the extension of a seaside Rambla running between the town and the Mediterranean. Intended as a local agreement between the CNT and the Badalona authorities, the initiative was to be funded by a tax on employers, landlords and workers, as well as by slashing the salaries paid to Councillors and the city police

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<sup>44</sup> Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 10 January 1932 (AHN); La Batalla, 7 January, 6 June, 29 September 1932

chief. Following a series of mass rallies and demonstrations, it was evident that the plan was highly popular with the rank-and-file in Badalona, who saw it as a respite from the worst ravages of joblessness.

The Barcelona *faistas* were alarmed at what they saw as the 'reformism' of their comrades in Badalona. Trampling on the federal traditions of the CNT, the FAI advocated 'the expulsion of all the workers' organisation of Badalona from the Confederation' if the plan was ratified by the unions. Unbowed by this threat of excommunication, a Congress of the Badalona CNT refused to be treated as a naughty child by the FAI and adopted the project. This placed the FAI-led Barcelona CNT in a dilemma and while the initial threat to expel the Badalona CNT was not fulfilled, anarchist militants from the Catalan capital refused to accept the decision of the Badalona unions. According to a leading Badalona activist, in a singular disrespect for union democracy, 'a throng of Confederal men and libertarian idealists' came to the town to apply 'official and unofficial pressures' on *cenetistas*, explaining in a 'low and insolent manner', sometimes accompanied by 'more than dishonest means', that the problem of unemployment and all the sufferings of capitalism could only be eradicated after the final universal drama of social revolution. In the end, the *faista* line was imposed on the Badalona CNT. This was a disaster for Confederation in Badalona and it prompted considerable demoralisation among the grass-roots: 'many workers, totally disgusted, destroyed their union cards', while large numbers of unemployed, whose hunger dulled the revolutionary expectancy that overflowed inside the FAI, displayed 'total and desperate indifference' towards unions.<sup>45</sup>

Opportunistically, the FAI did not balk in its cynical exploitation of the issue of unemployment as a weapon against its enemies in the struggle for power within the Confederation. While *faistas* berated the 'reformist' calls of the anarcho-syndicalists for rank-and-file contributions to union-organised jobless funds, the anarchist-led Builders' Union ran its own 'unemployed contribution' among employers and provided subsidies to those jobless workers registered with its *bolsa de trabajo*. Moreover, despite their

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<sup>45</sup> *La Colmena Obrera*, 30 October, 6 December 1931; Manent i Pesas, *Records*, pp.152-174

maximalism, the anarchists were not blind to the need to introduce short-term benefits for the jobless, even if they were far from practicable or, for that matter, desirable. To be sure, a common anarchist demand was 'the measuring out of work' among all employed and unemployed; 'we will all eat less, so that all can eat', in the words of Solidaridad Obrera. In practice, however, this policy amounted to the apportionment of misery and low wages to larger numbers of workers. More commonly, according to the policy adopted at the 1925 Amsterdam Congress of the International Workers' Association (IWA) and ratified by the CNT the month after the birth of the Republic, the anarchists upheld the 'continuous struggle for the implementation of the six-hour day'. Meanwhile, in June 1931 the CNT called on its unions to attain the 6 hour day in their industries within the space of three months, as it was a 'simple and most humane proletarian demand, [which] in fact constitutes the socio-economic-political revolution within capitalist privilege'. Yet the talk of the six-hour day was little more than verbal demagoguery. Not only did the battle for the six-hour day require strong, mass, united unions, precisely the very things that anarchist sectarianism was rendering impossible, but many unions, most vocally the Barbers and the Shop workers, pointed out the absurdity of the policy when they had not yet won the eight hour day. The CNT Dockers went as far as describing the slogan for the six-hour day 'a famous piece of nonsense'.<sup>46</sup>

Under the inspiration of the FAI the unemployed inside the CNT were also exploited for guerrilla actions and acts of 'propaganda by the deed'. The aim of the *faistas* was to encourage the unemployed to disrupt public order to show the authorities and the wider populace the despair and the spirit of rebellion of the jobless. This cynical manipulation of the jobless as cannon-fodder for the wider project of 'revolutionary gymnastics' was effectively sealed at a Plenum of the Barcelona unions in October 1931, where it was agreed to 'embark on a campaign with the unemployed, throwing them into the street'. The germ of this policy was earlier during the campaign of the CDE, who responded to tram fare increases with a call on workers to 'direct your rage against the

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<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 29 November 1931 (AHN); Solidaridad Obrera, 8, 25 January, 22 February, 15 March, 29 April, 7 May, 20 June, 11-14, 19 July, 9 August 1931, 14 March 1933; Cultura Libertaria, 1 January 1932; Trabajo, 15 September 1931

trams and buses!' Increasingly, then, the jobless were launched into a series of symbolic and futile struggles. The Santa Coloma CNT invited the unemployed to seize all unworked land, a call that led to a number of sterile clashes with the police. There were also growing instances of 'union placements' (*imposiciones sindicales*). These 'placements' involved unions sending jobless workers into workplaces, where they would set themselves to work and, at the end of the day, demand wages from the employers that they claimed had been 'legitimately earned'. On the docks, 'union placements' sometimes involved as many as 300 workers and tended to be particularly violent. Yet the 'placements' were a largely fruitless gesture for the jobless, as employers normally responded by calling the police to arrest the unwanted operatives, who ended up unpaid and, quite often, jailed for their trouble.<sup>47</sup>

It was an irony that the frustrations of the unemployed were tapped by the FAI *en route* to securing its hegemony within the Barcelona unions. Once at the helm of the Confederation the *faístas* failed to advance any realistic programme for the daily struggle of the jobless. Instead, as was prophesied by the *bloquistas* and the *treintistas*, the unemployed were progressively abandoned by the anarchists, who subjugated the interests of the jobless to their more pressing revolutionary ambitions. The shortcomings of this situation provoked occasional bursts of indignation among activists who lamented that 'nothing has been done' to organise the jobless.<sup>48</sup>

As well as its maximalism, the virulent sectarianism of the FAI also militated against an effective campaign on behalf of the jobless. It was axiomatic that agitation in favour of the jobless, whether of anarchist, communist, socialist or anarcho-sindicalist disposition, required wide class unity. By contrast, FAI zealotry served only to weaken the vitality of protest movements and dissipate potential proletarian strength by provoking damaging conflicts among the wider community of workers. It was no

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<sup>47</sup> Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 24 October 1931 (AHN); Tierra y Libertad, 5 September 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 17 May, 6-8, 18 August 1931; Communiqués from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 10 April 1936 (AHLL); La Vanguardia, 13, 25 August, 29 September 1931, 31 March 1932; La Noche, 9 November 1931; Las Noticias, 18 November, 13 December 1931

<sup>48</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 11 December 1931; Minutes of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 10 January 1932 (AHN)

surprise, therefore, that the FAI-controlled CNT did not repeat the kind of mass show of strength and solidarity embodied by the rent strike. Indeed, while the absence of far-reaching collective struggle against unemployment can, to a certain degree, be explained by the generalisation of repression from 1931 onwards, most of all, this owed to the tactical limitations of the *faistas*.

### 5.3. Against the Republic

After the September general strike positions between the main social protagonists in Barcelona hardened. The Fomento del Trabajo Nacional and the COPUB organised a fund for those members of the security forces injured 'defending the peace' during the general strike. The CNT and the FAI came under intense criticism. *La Vanguardia* lamented the return of 'the violent ones', while *Catalanistes* attacked the September action as 'prejudicial to the freedom of Catalonia'. *L'Opinió* led its own tirade against the 'professional agitators' and 'deviants' it believed were destroying the prestige of Catalonia. Meanwhile, from the Generalitat, the USC denounced 'the irresponsible elements who control the trade union movement', while Macià condemned 'a minority of professional provocateurs'.<sup>49</sup>

The appearance of the 'Treintista manifesto', however, provided a new option for the Republican authorities. In keeping with their penchant for differentiating evil from virtue, the Republican authorities began distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' syndicalists. New references to the *treintistas* as the 'healthy elements of the Confederation', fused with existing political imagery and mythology about the 'true Catalan worker' and 'the agitator', invariably taken to be immigrant and of either anarchist or communist affiliation. The stereotype of the immigrant *faista* became current in official circles, an essentially political construct aimed at isolating the anarchists from the mainstream of the Catalan *Volksgemeinschaft* in just the same way as images of rude and crude 'los sin trabajo' were intended to marginalise sections of the unemployed. As with the 'deserving'/'undeserving' poor, the ERC set about attempting to

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<sup>49</sup> Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, *Memoria...1931*, p.142; COPUB, *Memoria...1931*, p.488; *L'Opinió*, 9 August 1931



draw the 'true' workers into the Republican framework, while condemning the 'immigrants' and 'extremists' who, it was suggested, were bent on turning the 'good' indigenous workers against the Republic.<sup>50</sup>

The Catalan-immigrant dichotomy is not an adequate explanation of the internal divisions within the CNT, however. Not only were there immigrants among the *treintistas*, such as Pestaña, but a fair number of Catalans figured among the *faístas*, including Urales, Eusebi Carbó and García Oliver. A far more decisive difference between the two factions was the degree of occupational stability enjoyed by their supporters. In this context, it is evident that Peiró's ideas on stable workplace organisation were directly conditioned by his uninterrupted employment from 1923 onwards as a skilled glass worker at a co-operative in Mataró. On the other hand, as *L'Opinió* correctly grasped, although among the CNT rank-and-file '90% are not anarchists', the 'anarchist minority' was unquestionably backed by 'the people who sweat most and earn the least'.<sup>51</sup> This was at the root of the appeal of *faïsmo*, for the anarchists were stoically supported by the unskilled, who lacked any significant bargaining power and put in long hours for meagre pay, and many of the jobless, who did not sweat at all. That larger numbers of immigrants backed the FAI had more to do with the concentration of non-Catalans in the most insecure and unstable occupational sectors in Barcelona city. By contrast, the *treintistas* enjoyed most support in provincial Barcelona, where there were fewer immigrants but, most crucially of all, where the workforce enjoyed better working conditions, more secure employment and where the bourgeoisie was more transigent.

It suited the interests of the authorities and the Barcelona bourgeoisie to propagate the myth of the 'immigrant' FAI. The caricature of the 'alien' FAI was geared towards dividing the working class in much the same way as the unemployed had been divided and facilitated the distinction between the 'deserving' Catalan proletariat and the 'undeserving' immigrant workers. After the September general strike the authorities continued to expound the orthodoxy that the Republic respected the law and allowed for

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<sup>50</sup> *L'Opinió*, 9 August 1931

<sup>51</sup> *L'Opinió*, 9 August 1931

the open pursuit of legitimate working class aspirations, however, as the divisions in the CNT opened up, many Republicans believed that the CNT was weakened and that they could drive their advantage home, punishing the 'immigrant' FAI, while aiding the 'healthy elements' in the CNT.<sup>52</sup>

As the vice imposed by the authorities on the CNT closed tighter, Solidaridad Obrera correctly concluded that 'the block of our enemies is now fully meshed'. By the end of the summer strikes were now far more difficult to win, they lasted longer, were more drawn out and more conflicts were lost. This was a sobering reality that further radicalised union militants and convinced the grass-roots that there would be very few easy gains under the Republic. The civil liberties situation was another source of alarm. The authorities continued to hold *cenetistas* without trial and mistreat detainees. In the middle of September the first *cenetista* died from injuries inflicted inside the Vía Laietana police headquarters. Meanwhile, Bilbao, the architect of the CDE who was still detained without trial for his part in the rent strike, attacked what he saw as the new 'dictatorship in Barcelona'. Yet the die was cast and in mid-October Anguera de Sojo outlawed the FAI, banning its press and meetings, although Tierra y Libertad continued to publish after it shedded the FAI logo that it had sported since its inception. The FAI interpreted the official ban as proof that the ERC was 'anti-anarchist, like the Castilians'. In the view of Tierra y Libertad, it was a declaration of war from the authorities, a sign that 'from above, from power, they are provoking a social war that we must accept with all its consequences'. The *faistas* also warned that this provocation was a 'serious error', because 'in clandestinity and in anonymity its action will be more radical and more violent'.<sup>53</sup> Events were to confirm this prediction.

The FAI responded to clandestinity with a call for its *grupos* to come to the fore, 'ready to give up their lives for freedom'. The *grupistas* responded by directing their fury against those it held responsible for the injustices perpetrated against it. Indeed, the very week in which the FAI was forced into clandestinity *grupistas* began disrupting

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<sup>52</sup> La Calle, 11 September 1931

<sup>53</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 6-19 September, 1-7 November, 8 December 1931; Tierra y Libertad, 26 September, 10, 17, 31 October 1931

meetings of the ruling Catalan and Spanish parties. In early November a Republican-Socialist meeting was scheduled to take place on Montjuïc, at which Victoria Kent, the Director of Prisons, Companys, the Mayor of Madrid and Araquistáin, Largo's intimate ally, were all due to speak. The occasion was 'converted' by anarchists into a prisoners' demo. According to Solidaridad Obrera, the mere mention of Companys's name 'produced a wave of repulsion in the auditorium', while Kent was jeered and could not be heard over the chants in support of the prisoners, as 'popular fervour took over the meeting'. The following month an ERC meeting in Poblenou was, according to Solidaridad Obrera, 'converted into a rally for our prisoners', producing 'something of a shindy (*trifulca*)' and a certain amount of fighting as *faístas* armed with coshes and iron bars overcame Esquerra stewards. This was followed by more attacks on ERC meetings, in both the Catalan capital and in the provinces, as the gulf between the anarchists and what they mocked as a 'pseudo-revolutionary' party of lawyers' widened considerably.<sup>54</sup>

In what was perhaps a last ditch attempt by the Esquerra to curry favour with CNT moderates, towards the end of 1931 the party launched a campaign against the Civil Governorship of Anguera de Sojo, the person who had done most to turn the Barcelona Confederation against the Republic. The ERC drive against Anguera de Sojo is, nevertheless, open to various interpretations and it could be maintained that the removal of such a bellicose individual from public office actually made good sense in terms of the 'order' espoused by the Esquerra. Whatever the rationale, the ERC did contribute to the pressure that saw the irascible Civil Governor resign in December 1931, although the breach between the ERC and Anguera de Sojo was later healed.<sup>55</sup>

However, by the time Anguera de Sojo stood down, the anarchists had already locked the CNT into the spiral of violence that was integral to the 'revolutionary gymnastics'. As far as the *faístas* were concerned, even if these insurrectionary exercises

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<sup>54</sup> Tierra y Libertad, 31 October 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 3 November, 3-5, 8 December 1931; L'Opinió, 3 December 1931; La Publicitat, 6 December 1931; La Batalla, 10 December 1931

<sup>55</sup> L'Opinió, 1, 13 November, 13, 23 December 1931; Azaña, Obras, vol.4, pp.273-274, 282-283, 515-516; Las Noticias, 23-29 December 1931. Testifying to the later rapprochement between Anguera de Sojo and the ERC leaders, the ex-Civil Governor attended the Second birthday party for the Republic in April 1933 as the guest of Macià, the President of the Generalitat, and Aiguader i Miró, the Mayor of Barcelona: Cucurull, Catalunya, p.188.

did not provide the desired spark that would set-off the latent revolutionary fire, they were at least determined to impede the institutionalisation of the proletariat within the Republic by forcing the authorities to rely on repressive measures. After a speaking tour by Prisoners' Support Committees activists, including Durruti and Francisco Ascaso, the insurrectionary script of the *faístas* was acted out for the first time on January 18, 1932 in Alt Llobregat, where anarchist-led miners pronounced libertarian communism.<sup>56</sup>

It later transpired that the miners had been led to believe that 'the social revolution had erupted' and that 'Spain was in arms'. In Figols, *cenetistas* responded by disarming the representatives of the state, raising the red-and-black flag of the CNT over official buildings and declaring the advent of classless society. The rising spread like wild fire throughout the worker-colonies of Alt Llobregat, spurred on by starvation wages and employer intransigence in a series of recent local conflicts in the textiles and mining sectors. Nevertheless, the insurgents were peaceful in their methods and there was no retribution directed at either property-owners or the security forces.

The authorities were outraged at the rebellion of the miners. Obsessed that the Republic should be feared, Azaña responded in a bellicose manner, showing what he described as a 'determination to move with all speed and with the greatest violence to repress the rebellion'. With little thought of mediation, the Minister for War dispatched General Batet, in his capacity as head of the 4th 'organic' military region, to quell the rising, giving him 15 minutes to re-impose order. Fortunately, the prudence of Batet prevented a blood bath and the insurrectionists surrendered peacefully to the army, when he guaranteed that their lives would be respected.<sup>57</sup>

The response of the CNT to the rising displayed none of the decisiveness shown by the authorities. Confirming the ruralist belief of the FAI that the city was the

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<sup>56</sup> My analysis of the events of January 1932 is taken from the following sources: *Las Noticias*, *L'Opinió*, *La Veu de Catalunya* and *La Vanguardia*, 20-30 January 1932; *Tierra y Libertad*, 23 January, 6, 13, 26 February 1932; *El Luchador*, 5, 12, 26 February 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 January, 3-6 March 1932; *Cultura Libertaria*, 5 February 1932; *La Batalla*, 29 January, 4, 11 February 1932; *Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation*, 5 February, 7, 10 March 1932 (AHN); Francesc Madrid, *Film de la República Comunista libertaria*, Barcelona, 1932; Cristina Borderias, *La insurrección del Alt Llobregat. Enero 1932. Un estudio de historia oral*, MA thesis, University of Barcelona, 1977

<sup>57</sup> Azaña, *Obras*, vol.2, pp.139-141, vol.3, pp.311-312, vol.4, p.326; Ballbé, *Orden público*, p.342

'saboteur' of the revolution, there was immense confusion in Barcelona, where the Local Federation did not even hear of the events in Figols until the afternoon of January 19.<sup>58</sup> It was a further 24 hours before representatives of the Barcelona organisation met with delegates from the CNT Regional and National Committees and activists from Figols and Manresa. Even then, instead of preparing a solidarity strike in Barcelona, many union delegates, *faístas* included, 'went home to bed', rather than stay in contact with the Local Federation. Finally, before what it called the 'consummated act', the Catalan CNT Regional Committee 'agreed to make the movement its own'. However, the Regional Committee made no attempt to channel the rising and while Barcelona awaited a generalised uprising in the provinces, the provinces hung on the lead of the capital. The Barcelona CNT leaders prevaricated until the weekend, when they called a general strike that was destined to have a reduced impact on a few factories, bars and part of the transport network. Only on Monday, a full week after the beginning of the rising in Figols, did the movement have a real impact in the Catalan capital, where the strike was complete in the large metal and textile factories. The Confederal Defence Committees also entered the fray, setting up barricades in Clot and Sant Andreu in the North of the city and engaging the *Asaltos* in a number of gunfights. The *faístas* also took to the streets in l'Hospitalet and in La Torrassa an *Asalto* was shot dead.

The events of January 1932 proved that the Confederal Defence Committees were still far from operational. Firstly, the element of surprise was lost when Durruti and Francisco Ascaso were arrested in 'La Tranquilidad', the bar on El Paral·lel that served as the nerve-centre of the FAI-apparatus. Secondly, according to the Builders' Union delegate in the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, the '300 comrades on a war footing on the streets' lacked the weapons of combat as 'the comrade who knew their secret location was captured'. The authorities showed no such disorganisation in restoring order. Heavily-armed *Asaltos* were dispatched to occupy peripheral working class districts and by the end of the day of the strike a fragile peace had been imposed on Barcelona, with over 200 detainees. The post-rising repression showed a shift in policy

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<sup>58</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 17 January 1932

on the part of the authorities, who now sought to repress without quarter the most revolutionary sectors of the proletariat in a bid to decapitate a radicalised labour movement, leaving moderate, more pliable elements at the helm. This policy was crowned by the deportation without trial of 104 anarchists to Spanish Guinea and the Sahara under the *Ley de Defensa de la República*, a number of whom, including Durruti and Francisco Ascaso, had played no part in the rising whatsoever. In his memoirs, Azaña made it clear that this draconian measure was part of a strategy to free Pestaña from 'the preponderance of the gunmen', as 'his situation is difficult among the revolutionaries'. Companys, meanwhile, provided Azaña with a list of names of *faistas* still at liberty who, though innocent of any specific offence, were in his opinion 'dangerous individuals'. Lastly, the repression underlined the continuation of military power in the Republic and despite the Azaña reforms a number of *faistas* and *bloquistas* were tried and jailed by army Councils of War for 'insulting the authorities'.<sup>59</sup>

The scale of the post-rising repression inhibited any effective mass protest by the CNT against the deportations. When the Builders' Union called for a 24 hour general protest strike, the Transport and Railway Workers' unions revealed that such a stoppage was an impossibility because the CNT 'has lost control of the workers' owing to 'the disorientation which exists within our class following the recent mobilisation'. Although they were not involved in the rising, the repression also affected the BOC, whose offices were closed indefinitely and a number of *bloquistas* were interned without trial. Nevertheless, it was the CNT that bore the brunt. The press and unions of both the CNT and the anarchists were subjected to increased official harassment. Solidaridad Obrera was banned until early March and all CNT unions were still suspended in April, providing the employers with an opportunity to victimise large numbers of militants. The Generalitat followed suit and sacked numerous *cenetistas* from its flickering public works programme.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Madrid, *Ocho meses*, pp.171-172; Azaña, *Obras*, vol.3, pp.326-339; *La Calle*, 19 February 1932; *Las Noticias*, 11 February 1932; *Tierra y Libertad*, 26 February, 4 March 1932; *La Batalla*, 9, 30 June 1932

<sup>60</sup> *Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation*, 8 February 1932 (AHN); *Las Noticias*, 2, 17 February 1932; *Tierra y Libertad* and *Cultura Libertaria*, 1 April 1932

Given the failure of mass protests, the CNT showed its opposition to repression by relying increasingly on the armed propaganda of the Confederal Defence Committees. In the view of one Barcelona *faísta*, 'violence engenders violence'. Accordingly, the protests against the repression assumed the form of a bomb campaign in which the Barcelona Council Chambers and those workplaces where militants had been victimised were targeted. Meanwhile, in nearby Terrassa, anarchist *grupos* seized the town for a few hours in protest at the deportations.<sup>61</sup>

The January action produced the definitive breach between the various factions inside the CNT. The *treintistas* opined that the chaotic 'putsch' exemplified all the limitations of the libertarians. The same was true of the *bloquistas*, who dammed the FAI for failing to grasp that the revolution needed a co-ordinated seizure of power. The BOC also criticised the *treintistas* for failing to keep abreast of revolutionary developments. The FAI, meanwhile, mythologised the rising as a blood offering to anarchy, while denigrating the 'cowardice' of other tendencies in the labour movement.<sup>62</sup>

Before the *bloquistas* or the *treintistas* could take advantage from the removal of many key *faístas* from Barcelona and attribute responsibility for the January debacle to the revolutionary fantasies of the FAI, the anarchists took the initiative and embarked on their own quest to find 'the cause of the failure' of the rising. This was followed throughout the spring of 1932 by what was little more than a FAI-inspired witch-hunt, in which the anarchists deflected attention away from emptiness of their insurrectionary preparations with a fierce campaign of defamation against their enemies in the CNT. In the meetings of the Barcelona Local Federation, the Builders' Union delegate took the lead, attacking the 'shameful' role of the moderate-controlled Regional Committee for 'not preparing the ambience' and for failing to arm *grupistas* in the prelude to the rising. This criticism was upheld by the Barcelona Local Federation, who blamed the failure of the 'revolution' on 'reformists' in the CNT. Similarly, Manuel Prieto, one of the leaders of the rising, accused the moderates of being 'counter-revolutionaries'. In defence of the

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<sup>61</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 8 April 1932; *Las Noticias*, 16-21 February 1932; *La Vanguardia*, 5 April 1932; José Peirats, *La CNT en la revolución española*, (2nd edition) Cali, 1988, vol.1, pp.65-66

<sup>62</sup> *Cultura Libertaria*, 5 February 1932; *La Batalla*, 29 January, 4, 11 February 1932; *El Luchador*, 5, 12 February 1932

moderates, Emili Mira, Pestaña's ally on the Regional Committee, reasoned that it was unfair to blame the failure of a rising on those who had not contributed to its preparation. Mira also pointed out that the solidarity strike in the Catalan capital had been called off by the anarcho-syndicalists only after 'the events of great violence which had been promised [by the FAI] in Barcelona did not occur'. Despite reminders from the Leather Workers' Union of the dangers of 'playing at the revolution', in the emotional context of repression, the moderates were increasingly blamed for the failings of the rising and the voices of reason inside the CNT were drowned out by a chorus of blind insurrectionary optimism from the *faistas*. This was underlined by an address to the Barcelona Local Federation by 'Nosotros' member Jover, who stated that 'although materially perhaps Spain is not ready for the revolution, morally it is and the revolution should have been made...Spain, even without Barcelona, should have launched itself into revolution...[However] it would have triumphed in Spain and even in Barcelona if the Regional Committee had not sabotaged it'.<sup>63</sup>

Following the January 1932 putsch the FAI adopted the ultra-sectarian line which, irrespective of its effect on the CNT, dominated its orientation until the Civil War. In a bid to ensure FAI hegemony in the CNT the radical anarchists were prepared to expel their enemies from the unions. This mission was given a new impetus after some high profile defections from the anarchist camp to the BOC, including Ramón Magre, a former *Solidaridad Obrera* journalist, and Prieto, 'the hero of the insurrection of Alt Llobregat'. The FAI moved to isolate what it regarded as the growing dissident communist 'cancer' at the April 1932 CNT Catalan Regional Plenum in Sabadell, where the BOC-inclined unions from the Confederation, including the Local Federations from Girona, Lleida and Tarragona, along with a number of individual *cenetistas* from Barcelona, were all judged and expelled for heresy. The expulsions were followed by a series of attacks by *grupistas* on BOC meetings and a number of bloody skirmishes with *bloquista* stewards.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation*, 5, 7 February, 7, 10 March 1932 (AHN)

<sup>64</sup> *La Batalla*, 25 February, 3 March, 7 July, 15 September, 13, 27 October, 10, 17 November 1932



Seemingly unaware that they would be the next victims of the sectarian crusade of the FAI, the *treintistas* continued to vent their anti-communism and fully backed the expulsion of the *bloquistas* from the CNT in the first half of 1932. To be sure, the moderates had little chance to buy time for themselves. Like after the September 1931 Barcelona General Strike, the repression in Catalonia in 1932 favoured the rise of the FAI and weakened the case of those CNT Regional Federations which favoured an equanimous resolution of the differences inside the Confederation.<sup>65</sup> The growing disillusionment of the proletariat with the Republic after the deportations together with the worsening economic crisis in 1932, and the violence that accompanied it, had already conspired to wrench the initiative away from the *treintistas*. Moreover, the *faístas* rejected any prospect of a truce with the *treintista* 'counter-revolutionaries', who it believed were 'incompatible' with the CNT. Even Peiró, an anarcho-syndicalist who had devoted his entire life to the unions and was also a member of a FAI *grupo* in Mataró, was branded as 'the most degraded police agent' by anarchist *enragés*.<sup>66</sup>

The position of the FAI in the CNT was consolidated in March when Pestaña and Mira resigned from the National and Regional Committees respectively, only to be replaced by the *faístas* Manuel Rivas and Gilabert. The *treintistas* were now almost totally isolated in the CNT power structure. At the next Catalan CNT Regional Plenum held in May, the *treintista*-controlled Sabadell unions were forced to withdraw for their own personal safety. This was the prelude to the expulsion of the Sabadell unions in September. In what was described by the anarcho-syndicalists as an 'uncivil war', *grupistas* began attacking assemblies of *treintista*-led CNT unions and assaulting individual critics of the 'war of wolfs' unleashed by the *faístas*. Meanwhile, by the end of the summer, the signatories of the 'Treintista manifesto' and their supporters were being arbitrarily expelled from the CNT at 'syndical trials' that generally took place at poorly advertised meetings which were often pre-packed with *faísta* majorities from other unions. Finally, when the *treintistas* fully separated themselves from the CNT to develop

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<sup>65</sup> Dionisio Pereira, *A CNT na Galicia, 1922-1936*, Santiago de Compostela, 1994, pp.89-91

<sup>66</sup> *Cultura Libertaria*, 5 February, 29 April 1932; *Tierra y Libertad*, 1, 22 April 1932; *El Luchador*, 5, 12, 19 February, 8, 15 April 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 March 1932

their own syndical and organisational identity, the FAI showed its distaste by sending its *grupistas* to break-up the meetings and rallies of its anarcho-syndicalist rivals.<sup>67</sup>

The split of the colossus that was the CNT in 1931 and its repression by the authorities in the wake of the revolutionary gymnastics saw a staggering collapse in the bargaining power of the Confederation. Membership of the Catalan CNT fell from its high point of 400,000 in August 1931 to 222,000 in April 1932, a loss of nearly 180,000 workers.<sup>68</sup> This was just the beginning of the collapse in Confederal membership following the switch to 'revolutionary gymnastics' and the CNT would not re-gain its 1931 strength before the Civil War. Not only were the unions pruned of those syndicalists who erred from the path of anarchist righteousness, but hundreds and thousands of other workers who had flooded optimistically into the Catalan CNT in 1931 in pursuit of 'bread-and-butter' aspirations left the union disenchanted, cognisant of the reality that the immense combative syndical force of the Confederation had been significantly dented by the severity of the authorities and the pseudo-revolutionary line of the FAI.<sup>69</sup>

The bulk of these union defections was in the Catalan provinces, where the more stable proletarian milieu and a lower level of unemployment and repression gave less credence to the *faista* strategy of incessant confrontation with state forces. By comparison, during the first year of the Republic, the CNT lost under 50,000 members in the Barcelona region, what amounted to roughly one-quarter of the overall losses of the Catalan CNT. Thus, with 143,710 *cenetistas* in Barcelona province, well over half the overall Catalan membership, the standing of the Barcelona Local Federation was enhanced within the Confederation. Nevertheless, on a qualitative level, the vibrant exchanges that previously marked union assemblies were less frequent under FAI hegemony and it was not uncommon for gatherings to be near inquorate, with tiny

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<sup>67</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 March, 3 May, 17 June, 30 September 1932; *Cultura Libertaria*, 20 May, 17 June, 15 July, 16, 23 September, 7, 21 October, 3, 10, 17 November, 14, 21 December 1932, 3 January, 3 March 1933; *Sindicalismo*, 14 February, 14, 21 April 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 14 April 1933

<sup>68</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 April 1932; *La Batalla*, 21 April, 1 May 1932

<sup>69</sup> According to the British Consulate in Barcelona, by the middle of 1932, the CNT was 'finding that the bulk of the working people are failing to respond to their propaganda as readily as before'. See FO371/16505/W6457/12/41: Report from Consul-General King, 30 May 1932 (PRO)

minorities of the overall union membership resolving important questions. Moreover, increasingly devoted to the problems of clandestine existence and revolutionary preparation, perforce, from 1932 onwards the meetings of the Barcelona Local Federation had little opportunity to deal with the organisation of the unemployed.<sup>70</sup>

#### 5.4. Revolutionary Gymnastics and the Cycle of Insurrections

The removal of the most determined opponents to *faismo* from the CNT during the second half of 1932, matched by the growing predominance of unskilled, low-paid and unemployed workers with little bargaining power and few prospects of a gradual improvement in their position, paved the way for a new round of 'revolutionary gymnastics'. 1933, optimistically welcomed by *Solidaridad Obrera* as 'the year of the social revolution', was the high-point of this process, a year which began and ended with anti-Republican anarchist uprisings.<sup>71</sup>

On 8 January 1933, almost a year after the Alt Llobregat rising, the FAI initiated its second insurrectionary putsch with the aim of ending the 'mortal crisis of capitalism'. The new action bore all the hallmarks of the deficient organisation of the FAI.<sup>72</sup> On a national level, the rising was scheduled to coincide with a strike action of the CNT Railway Workers' Union, which the FAI hoped would prevent the mobilisation of troops. Yet as the UGT was the majority union in this sector, the opening premise of the insurrectionary plan was highly misguided. Moreover, the CNT railway workers were themselves highly divided over the projected action and, fearing that its dispute would be relegated subjugated to the insurrectionary ambitions of the libertarians, the strike committee called off their stoppage at the eleventh hour.

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<sup>70</sup> Minutes of the Plenum of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 29 November 1931, 10 February, 25 March 1932 (AHN)

<sup>71</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1 January 1933

<sup>72</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 8 January 1933. My analysis of the January 1933 rising in Barcelona is largely based on *Comercio y Navegación*, January 1933; *La Vanguardia*, *La Veu de Catalunya* and *L'Opinió*, 1-23 January 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1-26 January, 5 February 1933; Garcia Oliver, *El eco*, pp.130-133; Paz, *Durruti*, pp.244-249; FO371/17426/W472/116/41: Letter from Sir G. Grahame, 10 January 1933; FO371/17426/W576/116/41 and FO371/17426/W577/116/41: Reports from Consul-General King, 10-11 January 1933 (PRO)

In Barcelona, the cornerstone of the rising was a plan to storm the military barracks in the capital in order to compensate for the arms shortages of the revolutionaries. However, the FAI showed few signs of insurrectionary prowess and in the days leading up to the rising a number of bomb factories were discovered by the police which, though technically impressive, reflected the poor preparation of the insurgents. The ally of surprise was completely lost when police succeeded in intercepting a number of *faístas* as they ferried supplies of arms and explosives around the city before the start of the rising. Similarly, a police swoop on the Builders' Union offices on Carrer de Mercaders led to the discovery of a large haul of ammunition. Complaints from the FAI that the bourgeois-Republican press and the police were 'fabricating' stories of 'anarchist plots' masked the irritation of the anarchists that they had inadvertently forewarned the authorities of the impending insurrection. Finally, following the arrest of García Oliver, one of the main architects of the insurrection, and the self-detonation of an enormous bomb factory in Sant Andreu, the Barcelona FAI brought the date of the rising forward and ordered a general mobilisation of its 'combat forces'.

Given this inauspicious start, it was not surprising that the putsch was a short-lived affair in Barcelona. The first major action by the insurgents was a two-pronged attack on the Law Courts and the Sant Agustí barracks on the Passatge de Pujades, on the edge of Poblenou and the Gothic Quarter. After 15 minutes fighting with security forces some 50 *grupistas* were forced to cover their retreat into the Poblenou district with hand grenades, having failed in their bid to seize the barracks and procure much-needed arms. Meanwhile, in the city centre a series of skirmishes on Les Rambles and the surrounding streets in the Barri xino, produced the deaths of two members of the security forces and a *faísta*. The police swiftly regained the upper hand on the city's main thoroughfare and prevented the insurgents from storming the Atarazanas barracks at the port end of Les Rambles. When the *faístas* attempted to reach the barracks along El Paral.lel, they were successfully repelled again by the security forces, who also

succeeded in dislodging the insurrectionists from their operational headquarters in Bar Rosales.

The failure of the advanced FAI squads to seize arms meant that it was only a matter of time before the putsch was snuffed out by the authorities. With the city centre reasonably secure, the scene of the fighting switched to the outlying proletarian districts, especially Clot, Poblenou and Sants and l'Hospitalet. Nevertheless, the combat remained very low-key and by the end of the first day the insurgents were clearly routed. The following day, despite some sporadic sniper fire in and around the Barri xino, Barcelona was relatively quite.

The pitiful scale of the rising bore few signs of the 'meticulous study' behind what García Oliver valued as 'one of the most serious battles between the libertarians and the Spanish state'.<sup>73</sup> Of the three sectors into which the insurgents divided Barcelona, only in the northern zone around Poblenou, under the control of Francisco Ascaso, did the *faístas* manage seriously to engage the security forces in armed action. This far exceeded events elsewhere in the city. In the southern zone, around the CNT bastion of Sants, the plans for the rising were immediately brought into disarray when the requisitioned taxi carrying García Oliver, the sector organiser, and some of his close associates, was intercepted *en route* to a planned attack on a nearby Civil Guard barracks. The most woeful showing, however, occurred in the eastern zone around Gràcia and Les Corts, under the control of Durruti. Despite his plea for the *grupistas* 'to die for the great cause of the proletariat', there were no recorded incidents of any significant disturbances in this sector, something that rankled Durruti for a long while afterwards. Meanwhile, plans to demolish all of the main military, civil and police offices in Barcelona and symbolically wreck the nerve centres of capitalist authority floundered due to the poverty of FAI supply lines. In many places FAI bomb factories were discovered by police and *faístas* were arrested. While Ricardo Sanz and a team of CNT drain workers succeed in placing and detonating a huge bomb under the Vía Laietana police station, the building, along

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<sup>73</sup> García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.130-131

with García Oliver and the other *faístas* who had been incarcerated in the basement, was saved by its deep foundations.

Many of the weaknesses of the rising were derived from the limitations imposed by the élitist *grupismo* of the FAI. For instance, while the FAI lost the element of surprise, by beginning the insurrection on a Sunday they immediately ruled out the possibility of organising a general strike of the industrial proletariat. This reflected the FAI's lack of interest in mass struggle and there was no attempt to broaden the movement beyond the 200-odd members of its *grupos de acción* in the Barcelona area.<sup>74</sup> Workers were neither leafleted nor informed of the revolutionary events that the *faístas* were attempting to force. In Clot and Poblenou events assumed comic-opera proportions when anarchist youth entered the bars and taverns to inform an unsuspecting clientele of the curse of alcohol and tell them that money was abolished.<sup>75</sup>

Elsewhere in Catalonia, support for the FAI action was very patchy. The movement had no real impact in the other Catalan provincial capitals, where the bulk of the organised proletariat followed the BOC. The only important centre in provincial Catalonia where libertarian communism was proclaimed was Terrassa, along with the smaller surrounding towns of Cerdanyola del Vallès, Montcada and Ripollet. Nevertheless, the rising remained a minority pursuit and in Cerdanyola del Vallès, with a population of over 3,000, there were under 50 insurgents, half of whom came from nearby Sabadell. Support for the putsch was equally poor in Ripollet where, after disarming the two Mossos d'Esquadra stationed in the town, the anarchists set about burning the municipal archive and the Republican flag. However, before the old society could be fully destroyed, the fledgling anarchist society was swamped by the security forces of the bourgeois state arriving from the Catalan capital, ending the libertarian communist experience in Barcelona province after only three hours.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> According to Peirats, there were 200 *faístas* in Barcelona, divided into 27 *grupos*: Huertas Claveria, *Obrers*, p.243

<sup>75</sup> Jaume Fabre and Josep Maria Huertas Clavera, *Tots els barris de Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1976, vol. 1, p.44

<sup>76</sup> Miquel Sánchez, *La Segona República i la Guerra Civil a Cerdanyola (1931-1939)*, Barcelona, 1993, pp.57-60

The failure of the masses to be ignited by the 'spark' (*chispazo*) of January 1933 left a few hundred armed individuals across the peninsular isolated, underlining the weaknesses of the revolutionary recipes of Mikhail Bakunin and Auguste Blanqui. Although the *grupistas* had acquired new experience of combat, they had also proved that they were ill-supplied and incapable of engaging the security forces in anything other than sporadic street battles, let alone confront the army. Moreover, given the negligible success of Blanquism in nineteenth century Europe, it was hard to see how in the first part of the twentieth century, against a more modern and heavily armed state, putschism could lead anywhere other than to disaster.

With hindsight, in both Catalonia and in Spain, the January 1933 rising was most memorable for the repression that accompanied it. Although in Barcelona the death-toll was eight, almost evenly divided between the security forces and the insurgents, the overall Catalan total rose to 16, following the application of the *ley de fugas* by the security forces in Lleida and Cerdanyola del Vallès. In the Catalan capital, the repression was spearheaded by the police and in the Via Laietana police station agents formed the infamous 'pasillo', flanking the route to the cells and beating detainees into unconsciousness with truncheons, coshes and rifles. One *faísta* had his nose broken with a rifle butt, while 'Nosotros' members were singled out by the police for specific attention that left García Oliver with a cracked head and broken ribs.<sup>77</sup>

The most horrific bloodletting by the state forces came in the village of Casas Viejas, a malarial hamlet in Andalusia. Typical of the uncoordinated nature of the rising, the anarchists of Casas Viejas, like the Figols miners a year earlier, believed that the insurrection had succeeded everywhere else in Spain. Consequently, when the Andalusians went ahead and proclaimed a new society, the insurrectionary movement had already been quelled elsewhere in Spain. Although this isolation would have been possible for the security forces to lay patient siege to the last redoubt of the insurgents, the government, particularly Casares Quiroga and Azaña, feared that events in Casas Viejas might re-ignite the flames of the still smouldering putsch. Keen to appear tough,

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<sup>77</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13-14, 28, 31 January, 2-4 February 1933; *El Luchador*, 10 February 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 27 January, 17 March 1933

the government issued stern orders to snuff out the rebellion. The *Asaltos* adhered to the severe line demanded by the government and, according to the investigative commission into the events that followed, they interpreted their instructions as an invitation to apply the *ley de fugas*. When the anarchists of Casas Viejas refused to surrender to the *Asaltos*, their improvised fortress was torched. Those who were not burnt to death were machine-gunned by the security forces as they attempted to escape, leaving a death toll of 22 dead, including several women and children. As a macabre lesson to the rest of the villages, the charred bodies of the dead insurgents were left on display before burial.<sup>78</sup>

This was not the end of the repression. There was a thorough assault on the CNT-FAI throughout Spain. All the major Barcelona unions, as well as a number of provincial ones, were banned indefinitely, thereby allowing the bourgeoisie to victimise workers of all persuasions and slash wages. The prison population expanded as police interned hundreds of known anarchist militants without trial. Educational Ateneus, bars and cafés frequented by activists were raided and closed down and in the Santa Coloma *Cases Barates* the Civil Guard established a temporary camp. *Solidaridad Obrera*, like the other titles associated with the CNT-FAI, came in for regular harassment under the *Ley de Defensa de la República*, accumulating bans and fines of thousands of pesetas for covering the repression or for simply mentioning events at Casas Viejas.<sup>79</sup>

The authorities took advantage of the circumstances to deliver a blow to the BOC, even though it had not participated in the rising. In Cerdanyola del Vallès the Civil Guard applied the *ley de fugas* against Pere Poch, a young *bloquista*. In the aftermath of the rising, the BOC central office in Barcelona was raided and a number of militants were interned without trial. The ban on BOC meetings and its press was intensified when Azaña ordered police to chase the shadows of an absurd 'anarcho-fascist-communist plot' to assassinate ministers. As the police net widened a *bloquista* with an anarchist namesake was arrested and charged for his involvement in the rising. Probably the most

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<sup>78</sup> Federico Urales, *La barbarie gubernamental: España 1933, Barcelona, 1933*; Ramón Sender, *Viaje a la aldea del crimen*, Madrid, 1934; Francisco Guerra, *Casas Viejas: apuntes para la tragedia*, Jerez, 1933; Jerome R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas*, Chicago, 1982, pp.186-200

<sup>79</sup> *La Veu de Catalunya*, 19 January 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 11-14 January 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12, 26-31 January, 16, 30 August, 20 September 1933



bizarre abuse of power was the arrest of Nin, the Trotskyist intellectual and respected Catalan translator of Tolstoy, who was detained on explosives charges.<sup>80</sup>

Police practices highlighted the manner in which Republican justice was becoming increasingly iniquitous. The freedoms promised in the Constitution were regularly by-passed and, confirming the assertion of the anarchists that Republicans sought to 're-establish the Inquisition', the authorities re-opened the notorious monarchical den of torture in the Puerto de Santa María in Cádiz as a 'preventive prison' to cope with the growing number of those interned without trial in Catalonia. With the number of social and political prisoners topping 9,000, Solidaridad Obrera declared that 'the whole of Spain is a prison'.<sup>81</sup>

The repression weighed down on the regular syndical functions of the CNT. Clandestine union organisers complained that they were unable to stand up to the employer's offensive, just as they could not forestall what they described as 'a system of imposition and injustice in the workplace'.<sup>82</sup> In an attempt to extricate Confederal unions from the post-rising repression, the FAI and the CNT maintained that the January 1933 insurrection was the exclusive work of the *faístas*. This represented a highly attractive escape route from repression, for not only did it hold out the renewed possibility of open agitation through syndical channels but, it also promised the extension of *trabazón* through the growing collaboration of *cenetistas* and *faístas* in the Prisoners' Support Committees. Furthermore, it is also likely that the FAI was concerned that the disastrous impact of anarchist initiatives on the CNT might provoke an anti-*faísta* backlash among the union rank-and-file in Catalonia or from other Regional Committees. Already Madrid *cenetistas* had used terms highly reminiscent of the *treintistas* to revile the 'sterile' revolutionary infantilism of the FAI, even suggesting that the Catalan CNT-FAI had been infiltrated by police agents or provocateurs 'who wished to bring a repression

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<sup>80</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 5 February 1933; Sánchez, La Segona República, p.59; La Batalla, 12, 19, 26 January, 2 February, 27 April, 8 June, 27 July 1933; Azaña, Obras, vol.3, pp.505, 512. Despite enthusiastic police claims of 'leads' and 'investigative procedures' in the 'Nin case', the charges were dropped after a number of top-ranking Catalan politicians, although ideologically opposed to the Trotskyist, demanded that he be released in what was a preposterous set-up: L'Opinió, 1, 5, 8 April 1933

<sup>81</sup> Sanz, El sindicalismo y la política, p.245; La Batalla, 9 February 1933; Urales, La barbarie, p.23; Solidaridad Obrera, 8 February, 10 March 1933

<sup>82</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 28 January 1933

against the CNT'. Similarly reminiscent of the anarcho-syndicalists, CNT, the daily paper of the Confederation in central Spain, reminded the Catalans that:

'the lightning blow, the hasty gamble, is already out-moded. Our revolution requires more than an attack on a Civil Guard barracks or an army post. That is not revolutionary. We will call an insurrectionary general strike when the situation is right; when we can seize the factories, mines, power plants, transportation, all the means of production'.<sup>83</sup>

Following both internal and external criticisms, the Catalan Regional Committee and the CNT National Committee issued a flurry of manifestos attesting that the unions knew as little about the January 1933 rising as they did about its precursor a year earlier. The CNT leadership also expounded that because the recent mobilisation had an 'exclusive anarchist content', there was no justifiable reason for the authorities to attack the Confederation. In its defence, the CNT even alleged that the rising was simply the spontaneous result of the 'misery' imposed on the people, 'violence to oppose the organised violence of the state' and a régime that promised justice but left capitalist privileges and oppression intact. This view was endorsed by the novelist Pio Baroja who praised the 'optimism and purity of the fighters', whose rebellion he attributed to the failure of the Republic to act against unemployment. Finally, in February, the FAI Peninsular Committee accepted full responsibility for the putsch, emphasising that its action did 'not go hand in hand with the CNT', which remained 'absolutely independent of us'.<sup>84</sup>

The efforts of the directive committees of the CNT-FAI to exonerate its institutions of guilt were undermined firstly, by the obvious determination of the authorities to break the power of the major Catalan unions, and secondly, by the logic of *trabazón*, which implicated the Confederation in the rising by more than just association. In fact, not only had the putsch in Catalonia had been organised through the Confederal Defence Committees, of which García Oliver was secretary but, it is unthinkable that the Barcelona CNT Local Federation did not know the details of the rising.

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<sup>83</sup> CNT, 9 January 1933

<sup>84</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 10-15 January, 10, 15 February 1933

It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that there was any serious discussion about the putsch among the bulk of union militants. The January 1933 rising highlighted the extent to which the conspiratorial putschism of the anarchists was thoroughly inconsistent with the democratic traditions to which the CNT laid claim. It appears that the initial suggestion that the railway strike should be exploited for the mobilisation came from 'Los Indominables', a Barcelona-based FAI *grupo* of Bakuninists, who opined that once the masses saw the example of the sublime mobilisation of the selfless anarchist fighters, the rising would spread spontaneously throughout Spain. Once 'Los Indominables' gained the assent of the Catalan CNT Regional Committee for their plan, 'Nosotros' took over the preparation of the rising. Although not formally part of the anarchist organisation, 'Nosotros' effectively controlled the Catalan CNT-FAI by 1933. In the words of Fidel Miró, 'Nosotros' was a 'super-FAI' or a 'FAI within the FAI', which constituted the *de facto* leadership of the movement, largely on the basis of the charismatic power wielded by the living anarchist legends of 'The Three Musketeers'. 'Nosotros' ensured that its plan for the putsch was accepted by the higher committees of the CNT-FAI, where after it fell to García Oliver to establish the date for the rising and authorise the Confederal Defence Committees to act. According to Pedro Morato Queraltó, a provincial member of the Barcelona FAI who was detained for his part in the putsch, the level of internal dialogue that preceded the rising was minimal: no more than 50 delegates from the Catalan Confederal Defence Committees voted on the desirability of the rising. There was no further discussion and the final details were outlined in a smaller gathering at an unnamed bar on El Paral·lel.<sup>85</sup>

The putschism underlined the incapacity of the anarchists to organise a co-ordinated, state-wide revolution; they sacrificed everything to their adventurism and they destroyed, without creating a new power. The FAI had split the CNT, it had disrupted the daily syndical tasks of the Confederation through its belief in isolated group action, while its blind policy of revolutionary confrontation with the state brought repression crashing down on the entire labour movement. By March 1933 Catalan CNT

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<sup>85</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 23 January 1932; Gómez Casas, *Anarchist Organisation*, p.137; Miró, *Cataluña*, p.66; *La Publicitat*, 30 June 1933

membership was under 200,000, around half its level two years earlier. Moreover, in the Barcelona bastion of the FAI, CNT numbers were also beginning to be depleted, falling by 30,000 in under a year to 113,000.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, the *treintistas* and the *bloquistas* increased their own organisational drives and consolidated their distinct syndical identities.

These shortcomings of FAI 'putschism' led other libertarian factions who sought a more 'constructivist', syndical-based transformation to define themselves in terms of their opposition to the 'revolutionary gymnastics'.<sup>87</sup> However, the anarchist opponents to the 'cycle of insurrections' were still in a minority in Catalonia, the veritable engine of *faísmo*, where the standing of 'Nosotros' was largely intact. Nevertheless, fearing that the so-called 'constructivists' would 'strangle' the revolution, 'Nosotros' opted to join the FAI on a formal basis. The FAI organisation was also now placed on a more coherent basis, with a new *faísta* Regional Committee formed in Catalonia, while in the capital, a Local Committee was responsible for connecting the disparate *grupos* that still sometimes existed in total independence from other FAI groups.<sup>88</sup>

The FAI, therefore, clung to its essentially Bakuninist conception of the insurrection. Indeed, by the logic of 'revolutionary gymnastics', the January 1933 putsch and the subsequent rise in state brutality actually made it a greater success than the January 1932 rising. According to Durruti, irrespective of the ramifications in human and organisational terms, the January 1933 action was validated as it forced the pendulum movement from reformist illusion towards revolutionary aspiration, by preventing the bourgeoisie from passively co-opting the proletariat into the capitalist economic order and thwarting Republican politicians from peacefully fortifying the new state around a reformist labour movement. Meanwhile, the *faístas* continued to nourish their élitist and voluntarist conceptions of a revolutionary process that they believed they could force forward alone, without the communists, socialists or even the anarcho-syndicalists. Ludicrously, just one month after the suppression of the January 1933 putsch the FAI

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<sup>86</sup> CRT, *Memoria...de marzo de 1933*, pp.5-9

<sup>87</sup> Miró, *Cataluña*, p.51

<sup>88</sup> García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.123-124

Peninsular Committee affirmed that 'we have no doubt that the social revolution will soon come'.<sup>89</sup>

Before this final revolutionary showdown, the FAI had no short-term policies around which to organise the unemployed. Instead, from clandestinity the anarchists continued their policy of 'throwing the jobless into the street' and calling on the unemployed to 'rebel' for 'death or victory' in the fight for their 'right to life', irrespective of the unpopularity of this strategy with sections of the jobless. Nevertheless, many of the unemployed and the unskilled were prepared to follow the slogans of the FAI and throughout 1933 there was an upsurge of guerrilla activity within their ranks. 'Union placements' continued and there were cases of 200-strong groups of jobless workers entering building sites and metal works in central Barcelona and attempting to work, before the police arrived to remove them. In a bid to generate employment groups of jobless builders began ripping up paving stones around the city. The anarchist call to action met with strong assent among the new proletariat in the ghettos. In Sant Andreu and Santa Coloma unemployed workers periodically occupied unused land and fought the police who attempted to eject them. In the proletarian belt of the city where town met country the unemployed continued to enter estates and requisition foodstuffs, particularly in l'Hospitalet. Lastly, patterns of popular illegality were largely unaffected by police repression, as reflected in assaults on shops, markets and 'sacrilegious robberies' in churches. In one dramatic raid, the Mercat del Borne in the Gothic Quarter was taken early in the morning by over a group of 80 people who tied up lorry drivers and made away with all the foodstuffs that they could carry.<sup>90</sup>

As 1933 wore on, the pseudo-revolutionary violence of the *grupistas* increasingly permeated the issue of unemployment which, the *faístas* maintained, had to be resolved exclusively by force. Accordingly, a number of employers who laid workers off during slack periods received death threats from FAI *grupos*. In the summer of 1933 *faístas* in l'Hospitalet acted on these threats and killed two employers in the city in

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<sup>89</sup> Paz, *Durruti*, pp.248-249; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 February 1933

<sup>90</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 13 January, 17 March 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 February, 14 March, 4, 15 April 1933; *Comercio y Navegación*, February-May, July 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 5 January, 14, 18 February, 14-15 March 1933; *Catalunya Roja*, 26 February 1933

separate machine gun attacks. On other occasions, factories where workers had been sacked were bombed by the *grupistas*.<sup>91</sup>

The central struggle spearheaded by the unemployed of the CNT in 1933 was the epic four month strike by the Builders' Union, a mobilisation that provided a constant side-show to city life during the summer.<sup>92</sup> As we saw earlier, this most deprecated section of the workforce, which comprised the veritable outcasts of Catalan industry, had been devastated by unemployment since the collapse of the dictatorship in 1929. A mainstay of *faïsmo* since 1930, the Builders' Union went on strike in 1933 to attain the six-hour day, despite the fact that the employers in the sector had never even accepted the legal working day of eight hours. Nevertheless, it was testimony to the ardour of the unskilled that the struggle drew in thousands of unemployed builders in Barcelona, who attended mass rallies and organised picketing squads in the hope that success in the strike would allow them to be re-integrated into the workplace.

The volatile intervention of the unemployed in the builders' strike engendered a firm dialectic according to which the more the authorities clamped down on the union, the more explosive became the mobilisations of the hungry strikers and jobless builders. This was epitomised by a 25,000-strong demonstration organised in protest at a series of bans on strike meetings in June. Predictably, the authorities ordered the security forces to disperse the demonstration and when *Asaltos* fired on the march, killing one striker and wounding many more, the builders turned the centre of Barcelona into a battleground, arming themselves with bottles, chairs and paving stones from nearby bars in the Plaça de la Universitat. Prevented from marching openly, the demonstration split up into frustrated fragments and the builders registered their protest by riot, attacking, looting and requisitioning foodstuffs from commercial premises on their way. A large part of the demonstration moved along the Ronda de Sant Antoni, though 'not before having smashed to pieces all the shop windows of the shops and cafés of that bourgeois

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<sup>91</sup> La Vanguardia, 5 January, 17 May, 20 July 1933; Comercio y Navegación, June-July, November 1933

<sup>92</sup> For the 1933 Builder's strike see Comercio y Navegación, April-September 1933; Solidaridad Obrera, 5 March-15 August 1933; Tierra y Libertad, 28 April 1933; La Batalla, 20 April-24 August 1933; La Vanguardia and L'Opinió, 18 March-17 August 1933; Justicia Social, 29 April, 27 May, 19 August, 21 October 1933; Sindicalismo, 1-15 September 1933

thoroughfare', causing thousands of pesetas of damage.<sup>93</sup> The following month, as the builders pushed for recognition of their right to the streets, another protest march was blocked by *Asaltos*, producing running battles as strikers attempted to regroup in the city centre. Meanwhile, a section of the marchers swept through the Barri xino, attacking premises of businesses that had opposed the CNT, before launching an impromptu mass shop-lifting spree, smashing windows and seizing a considerable amount of goods and food. Reflecting the poisonous social divisions in the city, as the protesters entered Carrer de l'Hospital they greeted by an armed group of shopkeepers, who opened fire, killing a passer-by. Minutes later, in a nearby bar, the protesters found a strike-breaking building site foreman and shot him dead.<sup>94</sup>

While the Builders' strike initially involved thousands of jobless workers, the conflict eventually became a surrogate for the coherent organisation of the jobless. Indeed, the more protracted the struggle became, the greater was the involvement of the Confederal Defence Committees, to the detriment of forms of mass mobilisation. *Tierra y Libertad* promised that scabs would be bombed off the sites and from May onwards explosions were a growing feature of the conflict. In July a staggering 280 bombs were discovered by the Civil Guard in Barcelona province, 200 of which were in l'Hospitalet. Meanwhile, by early August explosions were occurring on sites at a rate of nearly one a day. These bomb attacks were the work of the vanguard *grupistas* who looked on the conflict as a means of testing the performance of their shock-troops. The rising number of gun attacks on 'scabs' and their Civil Guard escorts fulfilled a similar function. As the initiative slipped away from the union, the FAI brought terror to the centre of the social question. Following a call in *Tierra y Libertad* for anarchists to 'try' the 'socialist assassins' who betrayed the struggles of the working class, *grupistas* assassinated seven leading Barcelona *ugetistas* in the space of a few months in the summer of 1933. In the

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<sup>93</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, *La Publicitat*, *La Vanguardia*, 13 June 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 16 June 1933; *Comercio y Navegación*, June 1933; *El Luchador*, 23 June 1933

<sup>94</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 11 July 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 July 1933; *Comercio y Navegación*, July 1933

most grotesque case, a *ugetista* was assassinated by *faistas* as he walked hand-in-hand with his young daughter in a Sants street.<sup>95</sup>

Small group violence was a poor compensation for mass pressure and the mobilisations of the unemployed builders were increasingly sacrificed to sterile acts of *grupista* terror. Finally, with the strike in a stalemate situation, Ricardo Sanz, Bilbao and the rest of the anarchist leadership of the Builders' Union quietly ended the stoppage, accepting a return to work on the basis of a 44-hour week, along with small wage rises and slightly improved working conditions. This was a staggering sell-out by the anarchists: the settlement was little different to a deal produced by the Jurados months earlier that had been rejected by the CNT. It was also a significant retreat from the 36 hour week that the anarchists had promised the strikers and the unemployed right until the very end of the conflict. In a break with the CNT tradition of open syndical democracy, the ballot organised by the anarchist union leadership that decided the return to work was held in secrecy. Moreover, the ballot result - 1,227 voting in favour, with a mere 616 in favour of continuing the stoppage - was a pathetic and unrepresentative turnout from a union membership of 35-40,000, further underlining the sense of betrayal and demoralisation of the union grass-roots, as well as discontent at the attitude of the Confederation towards the unemployed.<sup>96</sup>

### **5.5. Dealing with the Unemployed and the Malefactors: *la Ley de Vagos y Maleantes***

After the January 1933 putsch the bourgeois psyche was petrified by the prospect of social unrest. The conservative press gave the impression of a veritable holocaust produced by 'the manoeuvres of Moscow', spinning fantastic yarns of 'god-fearing citizens' being forced to kiss the red flag during an insurrection that left an immense carnage of untold 'men, women and children dead and wounded'. The criticisms of the bourgeoisie fell squarely on the Republic. The Confederación Patronal Española, the

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<sup>95</sup> *Comercio y Navegación*, May-August 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 2 June 1933; *L'Opinió*, 9 July 1933; *Sindicalismo*, 14 July 1933; *Justicia Social*, 15, 22 July, 4 November 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 21 July 1933

<sup>96</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 11 August 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12, 15 August 1933; *Correspondencia Sindical Internacional*, 20 June, 18 July 1933



leading Spanish employers' confederation, issued a manifesto soon after the January rising ascribing all 'social crime' to the consequences of what it described as the 'advanced' social laws of the Republic. The catholic right developed this theme, explaining the dislocation of public order to the indifference of the laicist Republic to traditional moral values and the 'subversive' attempt to re-define the relationship between church and state. In similar terms, the rebellion of one of the insurgents killed by the security forces was attributed to the fact that 'he was separated from the family'. This, the right claimed, reflected the way in which by 'attacking the foundations of religion, the spiritual engine of all peoples, the family, property and order, the entire fabric of civil cohesion and social discipline are undermined'.<sup>97</sup>

Intent on exploiting the upsurge of 'social crime', the rightist press reported trials and repressive state activities on a daily basis under sections entitled 'Gunmen and Terrorists' or 'Yesterday's Disturbances'. These were often fleshed out with reportage of unconnected court proceedings, all in an attempt to give the impression that 'disorder' was a feature of everyday life under the Republic. Quietly nostalgic for the days of monarchy, the coverage of the rightist press favoured legislation that would allow the revival of preventive detention to inhibit 'unadaptable elements' from destroying existing civilisation with their 'revolutionary epilepsy'. While the propertied classes showered the Republican security forces with thousands of pesetas for their 'spirited defence' of the 'principle of authority', the authorities were upbraided for allowing 'anarchist outrages' to pass by with 'immunity'. The COPUB protested to the Generalitat about the 'anarchic ambience' offered by the city and the 'spirit of disorder that permeates our people'. Similarly, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional believed that the softness of the law encouraged 'excesses', something that should be rectified to 'make agitators feel the full force of their deserved punishment'.<sup>98</sup>

The all-encompassing fear for public order was replicated in the Republican camp. L'Opinió, the left-wing of the ERC coalition, carried a regular page entitled

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<sup>97</sup> La Veu de Catalunya, 9-14, 17, 20 January 1933; L'Opinió, 28 January 1933

<sup>98</sup> La Vanguardia, 10, 29 January 1933; COPUB, Memoria...de 1933, p.46; Comercio y Navegación, July 1933; Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, Memoria...de 1933, p.9

'Terrorist Disorders', in which it campaigned for 'greater energy' from the state to deal the decisive 'blow' that would finish 'once and for all' with 'terrorism'. Accepting the need for preventive legislation, L'Opinió favoured the 'inexorable punishment' of any transgression of 'public order' before the machinations of the 'malefactors' produced 'the destruction of society'. Meanwhile, the summer builders' riots had the 'Lluhíns' preparing for Armageddon, announcing they were on a 'war footing' because 'the enemy is knocking at the door, prepared to destroy everything'.<sup>99</sup>

The security fears of the Republicans, matched with their sensitivity to the criticisms of the right and the bourgeoisie, culminated later in the year in the enactment of the *Ley de Orden Público*. Drafted by ex-Civil Governor of Barcelona Anguera de Sojo, the law permitted the comprehensive suppression of the Constitution in times of social unrest and its replacement with martial law, according to which power would be transferred to the military until public order could be re-established. Article 38 allowed the authorities to 'prohibit the formation of all types of groups on the public highway'. Meanwhile, arousing numerous comparisons with monarchical crowd control tactics, the new law specified that 'if orders to disperse are disobeyed, after three warning signals the security forces will use the necessary force to re-establish normality. No warning is necessary if the security forces come under attack'. According to Ballbé, 'this law completed the conditions for an authoritarian state' and formalised the repressive powers of the state.<sup>100</sup>

Unlike in 1931, when members of the Madrid government cracked the ERC into line to back the *Ley de Defensa de la República* with threats to the Autonomy Statute, in 1933 the ruling Catalan party energetically endorsed the *Ley de Orden Público*. L'Opinió, the faction that had once been the most committed voice for reform inside the Esquerra, enthusiastically greeted the new law as 'a good aid for the Republic'.<sup>101</sup>

The right-ward drift of the 'Lluhíns' reflected the growing conservatism of all the disparate forces that made up the ERC coalition. In the course of 1933, with the

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<sup>99</sup> L'Opinió, 10-18 January, 30 April, 11-12, 22 July 1933

<sup>100</sup> Ballbé, *Orden público*, pp.359-363

<sup>101</sup> L'Opinió, 31 August 1933

autonomous institutions still in a process of evolution, extreme right-wingers from Estat Català sought to gain acceptance inside the ERC coalition for a policy of appeasement towards important sectors of the Catalan bourgeoisie. This authoritarian current centred on Dencàs, and his autocratic hench-man Miquel Badia, both of whom advocated a policy of blanket repression of the CNT. Dencàs's transition from a friend of the people in 1931 with a concern for social justice to a pseudo-fascist demagogue exemplified the trajectory of many of those inside the ERC who had moved sharply to the right in the face of social conflict during the early Republican years. The experience of fortifying the Generalitat from the criticisms of the left and the mobilisations of the unemployed was a highly sobering exercise of power for the Esquerra. For Dencàs, who had been head of the Comissariat de Cases Barates in 1931 at the height of the rent strike, his front line role against the tenacious resistance of the CDE had imbued him with a deep-rooted hatred for the rebellion of the proletariat. This was exacerbated by the experiences of both Dencàs and Badia in the *Catalaniste* circles in Sant Andreu, a peripheral district of Barcelona where thousands of immigrants had settled in the 1920s, many of whom went on to join the CNT. By the 1930s, Sant Andreu was particularly affected by the recession, becoming one of the main theatres for unemployment agitation. In reply, the militant *Catalanistes* in Sant Andreu targeted immigrants and the unemployed as the cause of all the socio-economic ills in the area, including the upsurge in illegality.<sup>102</sup>

To counter what they described as the 'enemy within', Dencàs and Badia formed the *Escamots*. Literally translated as 'squads', the *Escamots* were a para-military formation composed of radical *Catalanistes* from the essentially petit bourgeois youth groups affiliated to the ERC, particularly the Joventuts d'Esquerra-Estat Català, who were led by Dencàs. At the time of the creation of the *Escamots* in 1933, Madrid and Barcelona were negotiating the transfer of responsibility for law-and-order from central government to the Generalitat. Dencàs and Badia argued that by creating the *Escamots* they were grooming a militia force that could fulfil a key policing role within the Catalan security forces. In the mean time, the stance of the *Escamots* was vehemently anti-

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<sup>102</sup> *L'Opinió*, 5 November 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 15 March, 4-6 May 1933

proletarian and anti-immigrant. This was succinctly encapsulated in a manifesto issued by Badia and Dencàs entitled 'The FAI is the product of Spain. Death to the FAI!'<sup>103</sup>

The emergence of the *Escamots* brought to a head a number of internal tensions within the ERC coalition that had simmered since its formation. For the 'Lluhins', while their radical reformism had abated since 1931, they could have no truck with the demagogic populism of the *Escamots* and they impugned the group as 'apprentice Nazis'. The *Escamots* did little to heal the rifts within the Esquerra and they replied by attacking public meetings organised by the 'Lluhins', as well as smashing up the offices of El Be Negre, a satirical publication that was highly respected in *Catalaniste* circles. Finally, in October 1933 the L'Opinió group split away from the ERC coalition in opposition to the rise of Dencàs, Badia and their *Escamots*, forming the minuscule Partit Nacionalista Republicà d'Esquerra (PNRE).<sup>104</sup>

In contrast to the 'Lluhins', the bulk of the Esquerra swallowed whatever reservations they felt towards the *Escamots*. The violent methods of the *Escamots* were regarded by many inside the ERC as a fitting response to growing social conflictivity. This reflected the reactionary radicalisation of sections of the Catalan middle classes in the face of the economic crisis and anarchist mobilisations. Through their contribution to maintaining public order, the arrival of the *Escamots* on the streets in the summer of 1933 met the central demand of the bourgeoisie for extra security forces. In the absence of any alternatives, the cash-starved Generalitat developed the *Escamots* as a parallel security force, ensuring that the militant *Catalanistes* received full access to police records, particularly those of anarchist militants. Moreover, the *Escamots* played an important strike-breaking function, recruiting docile workers from their own ranks and from the Generalitat *borsa de treball* to replace victimised *cenetistas*.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the opposition of the notoriously anti-Catalan police in Barcelona, who complained to Madrid, by July it was reported that the *Escamots* were serving as auxiliaries to the security forces. From the start, the *Escamots* employed highly

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<sup>103</sup> Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, pp.208-213

<sup>104</sup> La Batalla, 26 January, 31 August, 28 September, 19 October 1933; L'Opinió, 24-26 October, 15 November 1933; Adelante, 25, 29 October, 3 November 1933; Cullà i Clara, El catalanisme, pp.193-381

<sup>105</sup> La Batalla, 3 August 1933; Solidaridad Obrera, 3, 16-18 August 1933

questionable methods. The very month that the *Escamots* began their low-key policing role they beat up a group of *cenetistas* in the Vía Laietana police station. On the streets, *Escamot* violence was increasingly in evidence. The *Catalaniste* 'third force' vented its anti-proletarian sentiments by provoking and intimidating union militants and attacking both CNT and BOC fly posters. However, the bulk of the aggression of the *Escamots* was aimed at the *faistas*, especially in the anarchist strongholds in Barcelona and in Terrassa and l'Hospitalet. According to Urales, in the summer of 1933 both he and his daughter were personally threatened with death by Badia and group of *Escamots* after a CNT rally in l'Hospitalet. In an equally notorious episode, Badia ordered the kidnapping of two young anarchists in Sants, who were then held and beaten up in a local ERC centre.<sup>106</sup>

The deployment of such an obviously politicised force as the *Escamots* as a quasi-police force aggravated the delicate equilibrium on the streets. The rivalry between the *Escamots* and workers erupted in a series of clashes in the summer of 1933. *Solidaridad Obrera* compared 'Badia's pups' and the 'fascist thugs' of the *Escamots* with Mussolini's *fascio* and the union-busting, employer-funded gunmen of Chicago. The CNT was, however, confident that it would see off 'the new gunmen of Barcelona', dealing with the *Escamots* today, just as it banished the *libreños* yesterday. In what seemed to be the preparation for war, *Solidaridad Obrera* began listing the names, addresses and meeting places of *Escamots*, detailing also the arms they carried, in order 'to prevent any unwanted surprises'. Meanwhile, the sightings of 'suspicious individuals' near the flat of Badia confirmed the poorly kept secret that at least one FAI *grupo* had vowed to finish with the 'chief of the fascist militias of Catalonia'.<sup>107</sup>

The ascendancy of the extreme nationalists within the Esquerra corresponded with a veritable outpouring of xenophobic hatred. The phantasm of the 'invasion of the immigrants' permeated nearly every sphere of Catalan life and was reflected in the

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<sup>106</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 7 July 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9-13, 20 June, 18, 20, 25 July, 1, 16, 23, 25, 30 August, 21 September, 5 November 1933; *Adelante*, 17 November 1933; *La Batalla*, 31 August 1933; 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 21-22 July 1933; *El Luchador*, 28 July 1933

<sup>107</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 27 September, 3, 9 November 1933; *Adelante*, 17 November 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 28 July 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1, 27 July, 3, 30 August, 6 September, 22 October 1933

discourse of politicians, linguists, moralists and doctors, all of whom focused on the 'dangers' posed to the traditional patterns of life by 'outsiders'.<sup>108</sup>

The exclusiveness of autonomous Catalonia was fully revealed in the *Catalaniste* press. For all their radical pretensions and their criticisms of the *Escamots*, the 'Lluhíns' upheld their own anti-immigrant and racist stereotypes, identifying 'illness', crime and social conflict exclusively with the 'continual invasion' of 'the escoria of the lowest society' and 'the stigma of a degenerate race, the carriers of the seed of indiscipline, crudeness, physical and moral misery'. In l'Hospitalet, *Catalanistes* berated the 'savages' and 'uncivilised parasites' who came to 'rich Catalonia' in search of El Dorado to constitute a 'monstrous curse on the city, spreading terror everywhere' and disrupting traditional Catalan 'tranquillity and bonhomie' with their 'social attacks'. Caricatures of the southern Spanish immigrants in the Republican *Catalaniste* press revealed a colonial mentality, portraying the raw material of *faïsmo* as deformed and contorted sub-human brutes, exactly like the depiction of the Irish in Victorian England. One cartoon in *L'Opinió* showed a pair of unshaven immigrants arriving at Barcelona docks. Momentarily disoriented by their new environment, one of the Spaniards asked his friend 'how will we get by if there is no work?' The answer from his learned friend was unambiguous: 'the women will go down to the Welfare, the kids can beg charity on the streets and we're off to create an uproar in the name of libertarian communism'.<sup>109</sup>

Like in 1931, the Esquerra claimed that its would-be reformist hands were tied by a cultureless minority of 'ignorant men', the 'unruly ones', who were disrupting 'the free Catalonia which we all want'. Similarly, the 'Lluhíns' asserted that were it not for the 'illiterate cowards' of the FAI, the Generalitat, the repository of rational authority, would initiate 'a true social revolution' through the 'evolution' of the 'civic revolution of April 14th'. Meanwhile, still clinging to the aim of winning over some 'responsible' sections of the labour movement to the autonomous project, *L'Opinió* maintained the distinction

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<sup>108</sup> *L'Opinió*, 17 January 1933; Vandellós, *La immigració, passim.*; Francesc Artal, Emili Gasch, Carme Massana and Francesc Roca, *El pensament econòmic català durant la República i la Guerra (1931-1939)*, Barcelona, 1976, pp.116-120

<sup>109</sup> *L'Opinió*, 23 January, 2 November, 13 December 1932, 11, 14, 17, 19 January, 3 February, 18 June, 12 August, 26 October 1933; *Fortitud*, 15 April, 30 July 1933; *Llibertat*, 5 August, 5 October, 20 December 1933

between those 'good' workers 'who live from their labour and deserve our respect' and the *faístas*, 'who have never worked and live off the backs of those who do'. Verbal support was occasionally offered for anti-FAI sectors of the labour movement, like the Sabadell unions, against the 'inculture' of the 'dictators of the FAI'. Normally, however, the Esquerra preferred to differentiate between militant workers of all persuasions, whether *treintistas*, *bloquistas* or *faístas* and the 'disciplined' Catalan worker. Thus, L'Opinió alleged that a supposed 'anti-Republican United Front' had been formed, comprising the 'immigrant-led' FAI, the 'red agitators' of the BOC and the monarchist right. Nevertheless, the FAI remained the major scapegoat for most of the problems of the autonomous régime and was believed to be 'acting under orders received from Madrid', in collusion with the anti-*Catalaniste* Spanish right, both of which spoke the same 'foreign language'. This, in turn, led to new caricatures of the 'anarcho-vampires' of the FAI, laden with grenades, pistols and bags of monarchical gold.<sup>110</sup>

The multi-faceted scapegoating of immigrants was instrumental in expanding the repressive consensus that had developed from 1931 onwards in Barcelona. Fears about the 'gushing invasion' of 'deviants' threatening 'to annihilate our race' bolstered an emerging bi-partisan consensus among Catalan political parties that a 'defensive cordon sanitaire' of increased police and judicial powers and 'the most severe immigration controls' were required to halt the 'uncontrollable flood' of 'undesirable aliens'. L'Opinió saw immigration controls as a 'matter of life and death', justifiable 'on social and economic grounds, for reasons of public order, for reasons of health', warning apocalyptically that failure meant that the 'invading army of occupation will end up triumphing over us...If the demographic offensive is not stopped, it is impossible to imagine where the bombs, terror and criminality will end'. Hel.leni Seguí, the daughter of 'El Noi del Sucre' who was periodically paraded by the 'Lluhins' as proof that the CNT had broken with its past, spoke of the need to 'finish with the preponderance of these individuals, the majority of them having come to Barcelona from far away lands'. The

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<sup>110</sup> L'Opinió, 22 January, 6 February, 9 March, 31 May, 27 August, 17, 20, 22, 25 September, 5, 12 October, 13 December 1932; 10-22 January, 16, 25 February, 26 March, 22 April, 11 May, 30 June, 26-27 July 1933; Llibertat, 5 October 1933

Catalan right and employers joined the reactionary chorus initiated by the Generalitat and in the autonomous parliament the Lliga backed immigration controls to impede the 'denationalisation' of Catalonia. Meanwhile, proving that the strategy of the rightists in the ERC was bearing fruit, the bourgeoisie was increasingly petitioning the Esquerra and the Generalitat to act on its behalf.<sup>111</sup>

The official effluvia concerning immigrants defied the industrial heritage of Barcelona, whose expansion from the nineteenth century onwards was bound up with the labour of non-Catalans. However, for all the talk of 'muricians', the reality was that between 1914-1930 many thousands of newcomers to Barcelona were from rural Catalonia, like Gil i Gil, the Deputy Mayor of l'Hospitalet, and the anarchist García Oliver. During the same period, the majority of the immigrants to Catalonia came from neighbouring Aragón, like Maurín, the BOC leader, and Valencia, like the anarchists Ricardo Sanz and José Peirats, all of whom spoke Catalan.<sup>112</sup>

The patterns of immigration clearly undermined Esquerra stereotypes. Moreover, these stereotypes also ignored the way in which social violence was conditioned by the economic recession. In reality, however, the fear of immigrants was a euphemism for the economic crisis and it was, therefore, no coincidence that 1933, the year in which the scares about immigrants became most shrill, was also the worst year of the economic crisis in Spanish state. Conversely, before the collapse of its social, economic and political certainties, when the Catalan bourgeoisie lived a life of growing splendour through the sweated labour of its immigrant operatives, complaints about non-Catalan 'scum' were rare indeed.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> L'Opinió, 14-17 January 1933; Comercio y Navegación, March 1933; La Vanguardia, 16 March 1933; La Batalla, 3 August 1933

<sup>112</sup> L'Opinió, 17 January 1933; Josep Vandellós, Catalunya, poble decadent, Barcelona, 1935, p.63; Balcells, Historia, pp.137-139. Although immigration from southern Spain grew considerably in the years of the dictatorship, this was incomparable with the massive immigration from these regions into the Catalan capital during the 1950s and the 1960s.

<sup>113</sup> By examining begging in Barcelona we see that the quantitative increase of unemployment, rather than the arrival of immigrants, underpinned the huge increase of the unemployed on the streets. Solidaridad Obrera, no friend of what it saw as a miserable practice of the 'weak and beaten', recognised this increase, describing the streets of the city to be 'replete' and 'full' of beggars. According to the CNT daily, after 1929 begging was no longer the vocation of the 'disturbed man, sick in body and spirit' but, the escape route of normal workers, the victims of mass unemployment since the advent of the recession: Solidaridad Obrera, 14 February 1933.



Scares about the 'army' of immigrants were a refraction of reality, a plea for a repressive poultice to be applied to the socio-economic wound of unemployment. *Catalanistes* of all persuasions put intense pressure on the Madrid authorities to end their 'benevolence' on the question of immigration and introduce new measures of 'civic defence' for 'the liberation of society from its enemies'.<sup>114</sup> However, from the point of view of central government, immigration controls were completely unacceptable, as this would be tantamount to the secession of Catalonia from Spain. Instead, the Madrid parliament introduced new repressive legislation aimed specifically against the 'outsiders' which most worried the ERC: the jobless.

This resulted in the notorious *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*. Justified as a measure against pimps and drug-pushers, the law empowered the authorities effectively to militarise Republican democracy and brand those who opposed government economic and social policies as 'dangerous' internal enemies of the state. This was a law of exception against the 'bad', 'undeserving' unemployed or any other individual deemed by the authorities or the security forces to be outside the conventional patterns of social control. Concerned with an assumed 'state of dangerousness' and the potential 'dangerousness' of the individual to society, the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was not meant to repress criminal acts, as these were already catered for by the existing penal code. Instead, the objective of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was to isolate those 'dangerous individuals' who the police or judiciary believed were a threat to public order in labour and concentration camps.<sup>115</sup>

The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* crowned the authoritarian conversion of the Republicans; it evinced their readiness to place order before the 'rule of law' and it signified their recognition that the project for the re-negotiation of state legitimacy had failed. The new law was a most revealing example of the abyss between the promises of the Republicans and their practice. Out of power, the Republicans always condemned preventive policing and they emphasised the formal equality of all citizens before the law.

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<sup>114</sup> *L'Opinió*, 15-17 January 1933; *Llibertat*, 5 August 1933

<sup>115</sup> This thoroughly repressive doctrine of 'dangerousness' has traditionally underpinned dictatorial rule in South America: Roberto Bergalli, 'La cuestión criminal en América Latina', *Sistema*, 49, 1982, pp.49-66

The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* showed how these beliefs had been revised and revealed that the Republicans now accepted that the rights of citizenship should be selectively denied to the poor. Highlighting the general contradiction between 'law' and 'order' in times of mass unemployment, the legalisation of preventive imprisonment that was integral to the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was anathema to the classicist legal assumption of the 'presumption of innocence' previously championed by the Republicans. This metamorphosis was encapsulated in the personality of Jiménez de Asúa, the respected PSOE jurist. The architect of the 1931 Constitution, Jiménez de Asúa emerged as the most ardent advocate of the judicial concept of 'dangerousness' in Spain. In drafting the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*, Jiménez de Asúa consciously circumvented the spirit of the 1931 Constitution, especially the clause that guaranteed the freedom of circulation of all citizens throughout state territory.<sup>116</sup>

The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* became a piece of legislative terror aimed at insulating private property and the 'Republic of Order' from the social tremors generated by mass unemployment. The advent of mass joblessness and the changes it introduced in proletarian social practices and psychology made such preventive legislation a highly attractive weapon in armoury of the state. This was alluded to in a highly revealing article on unemployment in *La Vanguardia*, written just months before the promulgation of the new law. Recognising that joblessness 'presents all the aspects of an epidemic that threatens to subvert the basis of social ethics', *La Vanguardia* discerned 'a new consciousness, a new form of morality among the masses' as mass unemployment tended towards the volatile fusion of the 'deserving' with the 'undeserving' poor. The 'underworld' was growing, the article went on, as witnessed by what it described as the 'enormous development of the army of the rogues (*picaros*). Many workers and employees are becoming degraded (*se encanallan*), uniting themselves with others who have always practised loutishness and begging (*la pordiosería*) and sponging (*sablazo*) is spreading in scale and in a manner that is frightening'. Action was needed, *La Vanguardia* concluded, to separate the 'dangerous' unemployed and 'the mob' (*el tropel*)

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<sup>116</sup> Luis Jiménez de Asúa, *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes. Un ensayo sobre peligrosidad sin delito*, Madrid, 1934; *Orden Público y Vagos y Maleantes*, Barcelona, pp.65-82

from the 'calm' ones, before unseen subterranean reverberations could engender 'a gang of wolfs springing up spontaneously from the depth of the mass, like in the great revolutions'.<sup>117</sup>

L'Opinió similarly reflected that 'at all costs' the 'dangerous poor' must be isolated from the 'respectable unemployed' to prevent them throwing in their lot with one another. Previously, in early 1933 the 'Lluhins' had bleated that 'because there is no such law against vagrants, it is necessary to pass one', as 'the entire territory of the Republic is invaded by vagabonds'. These sensibilities were heightened during the long protracted builders' strike of the summer of 1933, a conflict that the Esquerra felt was worsened by masterless men and itinerant labourers who wandered from city to city looking for construction jobs.<sup>118</sup>

The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* clearly matched the demands of the 'lovers of order' who were instrumental in constructing the new repressive consensus. The Fomento del Trabajo Nacional greeted the law as 'it would be able to stop the avalanche of disorder'. For the right, it was an 'excellent' law, 'profoundly innovative and vital for the defence of society' by 'removing those who are most likely to damage it'. The ruling parties in the Generalitat, from the Esquerra to the social-democratic USC, were similarly enraptured with a law they saw as 'indispensable', 'one of the most successful to come out of the parliament of the Republic', the end product of their two year campaign for action against 'los sin trabajo' (sic!) and the 'undeserving' immigrant jobless. Although the USC reviled Hitler's concentration camps, they had no qualms about establishing their own concentration camps for the unemployed of Catalonia and they fully supported the law drafted by their 'respected comrade' Jiménez de Asúa. Meanwhile, the *Catalanistes* proved their acceptance of the law by referring to it in Catalan as the *Llei de Maleants i Ganduls*, the text of which was proudly published in their newspapers. L'Opinió impatiently awaited the first detentions under the new law and softened up public opinion by intensifying its campaign against 'hobos' and 'tramps' and identifying the 'cabals of the unemployed' with issues like crime, social violence, monarchist

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<sup>117</sup> La Vanguardia, 23 February 1933

<sup>118</sup> L'Opinió, 3 February, 8 April 1933

intrigues, prostitution and street trade. At the same time, echoing the catholic panacea of work as an antidote to sin, the 'Lluhins' affirmed that 'idleness and vice go together'. Finally, L'Opinió warned the authorities that large sectors of the masses subscribed to the popular adage 'create a law, create a loophole' and believed that the new law should be used 'rigorously', illegally, if necessary, to restore 'normality'.<sup>119</sup>

The first cases brought under the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* were in Madrid at the end of August. Meanwhile, Joan Selves i Carner, the Barcelona Civil Governor at the time of the promulgation of the law and a close political ally of Companys, was still preparing the concentration camps in which 'idlers' were to be incarcerated. The main concentration camp in Catalonia was established in the Castell de Sant Ferran in Figueres, a primitive castle near the French border. Other centres were established in Barcelona, including one in the Can Tunis district, ironically at the site of the aborted public works with which the Generalitat had once hoped to remedy unemployment. In keeping with the parsimony of the Catalan authorities, there were problems freeing resources to build the concentration camps and many internees had to be held on prison ships in Barcelona harbour or in isolation in the city's jails until the purpose-built camps could be finished. Elsewhere in provincial Catalonia, the dilapidated jail in Mataró was brought back into service to house internees, a controversial choice which, like the rehabilitation of the Santa María del Mar jail in Cádiz, reflected the decision of the Republican authorities to use monarchical dens of torture to incarcerate the poor.<sup>120</sup>

Towards the end of September Selves i Carner announced that 'within a few days the application of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* will begin for real'. However, the Civil Governor went to great pains to emphasise that the law was to be applied not against 'real workers' or the 'unemployed', but solely against 'malefactors' to enhance 'public hygiene'. It was announced that the Barri xino, a 'place that seems to have its own laws', was to be singled out.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, *Memoria...de 1933*, p.140; La Vanguardia, 15 August 1933; Justicia Social, 25 November 1933, 14 March 1936; L'Opinió, 7 March, 7-8 April, 25 June, 11, 25-29 August 1933; La Batalla, 3 August 1933

<sup>120</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 31 August 1933

<sup>121</sup> La Vanguardia, 21 September, 22 October 1933; Solidaridad Obrera, 13 September, 3 October 1933

L'Opinió claimed that the first internees under the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* were exclusively 'riff-raff elements'. However, both the worker and daily press revealed a different picture. Indeed, from the moment it became effective, it seems that apart from being used to arrest 'hobos' around the port, the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was used to terrorise the unemployed in general. Numerous jobless workers were arrested and subjected to a humiliating interrogation during which they were forced to explain their mode of life and means of subsistence. The law was also used to criminalise the long-standing practice of the jobless of touring workshops in search of casual labour, an odyssey that was now liable to end in internment. Meanwhile, those jobless who responded aggressively to detention only confirmed official suspicions of their 'dangerousness' and were sometimes labelled psychologically disturbed. Equally, those who failed to have their documentation in order, whether by choice, or because they could not afford the cost, were also interned. The same fate befell the street traders, a perennial bête-noire of the authorities. Once the implementation of the law gathered momentum, any proletarian who did not enjoy regular work could fall under suspicion. For instance, there were many cases of workers being arrested while taking coffee in bars during their repose, including a 65-year old retired man. Proving that age was no exemption from the concentration camps, an 84 year old man was interned for begging. In another brutal case a blind man who earned tips opening car doors outside a top hotel in the city centre was interned in a camp.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the earlier commitments of the authorities that the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* would be used exclusively against the so-called 'underworld', CNT and communist unemployment organisers emerged as a particular target for the new law. 'Dangerous anarchists' practising 'union placements' were periodically interned. The law was equally felt by Italian and Argentinian anti-fascist exiles in Barcelona. In a test case, Durruti, Francisco Ascaso and Pérez Combina were all charged under the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* while they were on a CNT speaking tour in Andalusia, even though none of

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<sup>122</sup> L'Opinió, 30 September, 5 November 1933; Solidaridad Obrera, 5, 8, 14 October 1933, 28 August, 3 October 1934; Las Noticias, 31 January 1936; Catalunya Roja, 23 September 1933; La Vanguardia, 5, 26 September 1933, 19 May, 7 June 1935

the three was homeless and that all had jobs in a textile factory which, through an accord between their employer and the CNT, were kept open during their absences on union affairs. Following vociferous protests from the CNT, the Council of Ministers guaranteed anew that the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* would not be used against trade union activists. However, just a few days later police detained a *cenetista* in l'Hospitalet who, though victimised since 1931, worked casually in the Food Workers' union *bolsa de trabajo*. Jobless anarchists and those who had been either victimised or blacklisted during social struggles continued to fall prey to the law. One newly unemployed *cenetista* was picked up and interned by police the very week he had been made redundant. Meanwhile, trade unionists who had been held without trial were ritually re-arrested and interned 'legally' under the new law. If the authorities sought to take an individual off the streets they set impossible stipulations, requiring evidence of a continuous work record for the last five years and interning those who could not comply. Accordingly, even *cenetistas* with regular means of income and steady jobs but who alarmed the authorities with their 'dangerousness' were detained under the law, sometimes while at work. One such example was provided by Enric Pol, a *cenetista* from Reus and a resident of Barcelona. Pol worked three days weekly on the port for which he earned 50 pesetas and got a further 20 pesetas weekly for bill-sticking for the Leather Workers' Union. Evidently not an 'idler', the police had brought an unsuccessful case against him for bomb offences in the builders' strike and finally succeeded in putting him away for his 'dangerousness' under the clauses of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*.<sup>123</sup>

In fairness to the authorities it must be recognised that the law was also deployed against the so-called 'underworld'. Even then, however, the arbitrary nature of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was manifest. Reputed 'malefactors' were interned under the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* in a highly capricious manner. The obsession with 'dangerousness' denied numerous robbers and recidivists any chance of social reintegration or repentance as many of those with records for 'crimes against property' were interned. In the verve of

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<sup>123</sup> *La Batalla*, 22 June 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 August, 1, 13, 15 September, 7 October 1933, 24 October, 31 December 1935, 11, 36 January 1936; *Las Noticias*, 4 May 1934, 31 January 1936; Martín, *Recuerdos*, pp.77-78; *Tierra y Libertad*, 31 January 1936

the authorities to 'clean' the 'scum' from the streets, even individuals who had left jail after successfully serving their sentences and found regular employment were interned. Meanwhile, in an acceptance of the despotic criterion of monarchical justice, many 'recidivists' who had been held illegally without trial under the monarchy were detained 'legally' under the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* on suspicion of 'dangerousness'. The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was also used by the security forces to stop and search anyone suspected of an offence. Moreover, given the both the absence of rights to appeal and the unquestioning acceptance by the daily press of official descriptions of 'malefactors' leading 'immoral lives', detainees were in a highly precarious situation, a position sometimes exploited by the police to recruit confidants.<sup>124</sup>

The CNT placed itself at the forefront of the campaign to resist a law that it saw as the latest example of 'Republican repression'. Solidaridad Obrera retorted that it was the bourgeoisie and Republicans, not that the anarchists, who were opposed to labour, as the latter aspired towards a society based on the 'magisterial axiom: all those who want to eat, must work'. According to the CNT daily, to prevent the birth of this new society, 'the Republic of "workers" has armed itself with an arsenal of repressive laws, all aimed at the liquidation of the revolutionary danger'. The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was a 'fascist law', 'worthy of Mussolini or Hitler', which, it was alleged, was a prelude to the sterilisation of 'dangerous' types and the full implementation of 'the tactics of Hitler in Spain'. Moreover, 'to talk of laziness when half a million unemployed workers wander in misery through fields and cities is a tragic sarcasm, a sick jibe'. It was the height of cynicism to brand those who had laboured from childhood as 'layabouts', while capitalists who never lifted a tool in their lives were left freely to fritter their money away in casinos and in brothels. Consequently, the CNT raged that 'the real idlers go unpunished', like the bourgeoisie, 'a minority of professional idlers without anything to do', made up of 'malefactors', 'social undesirables' and 'parasites on the social corpus, accustomed to the idleness into which they were born'. The anarchists retorted that it was not joblessness

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<sup>124</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 23 September 1933, 21 September 1935; La Vanguardia, 5, 9, 19 September, 3 October 1934, 10 February 1935; Las Noticias, 30 May 1934; La Vanguardia, 9 August, 19 September 1934, 11 December 1935; La Humanitat, 15 January 1936

but the parliamentary system that fostered 'the worst of all idlers': the deputies who earned 1,000 pesetas monthly 'without doing anything' except renege on their electoral promises. Meanwhile, the police were 'well-fed and well-dressed idlers', maintained by the taxes of the 'ever-generous people'. In conclusion, Solidaridad Obrera quipped that rather than pick on the unemployed, it was 'the exploiters of the people' who should be interned and put to work, making 'the bourgeois, priests, ministers, deputies, military men, police, Civil Guard, *Asaltos* and Security Guards abandon their "layabout" professions to re-integrate themselves into an active life of socially useful labour'.<sup>125</sup>

By opposing the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* the CNT reaffirmed its contacts with the most disadvantaged elements of society. This reflected the broad humanist concern of the anarchists for the 'dispossessed' and individuals on the margins of established society. As Solidaridad Obrera put it, 'we are always with the weak, with the persecuted, those who suffer...for us, the abused are always right'. In similar fashion, Tierra y Libertad defended those pursued by the law, explaining that 'the vagrant is nearly always a heretic, a non-conformist who voluntarily places himself outside or against economic slavery', one of those 'without work, without a home, launched into an emigrant life' who bravely 'refuses to submit to the despotism of the powerful'. This approximated very closely to the lifestyle cultivated by some of the young proletarian bohemians in and around the anarchist movement and it was feared that the law was to be used against them to 'annihilate the free life'.<sup>126</sup>

In practical terms, the proximity of the anarchists to the 'undeserving' poor in the concentration camps created the possibility for an interaction between the two, building on what traditionally had been very good relations between 'social' and 'common' prisoners in the jails. The anarchists showed open solidarity with the 'common' prisoners, who, like their 'social' equivalents, were 'victims of bad-tempered historical justice'. Moreover, the libertarians promised 'an intensive campaign' against the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* and pledged to proselytise among the 'malefactors' in the camps in the hope that 'through their contact with us, they might be dignified, transformed into anarchists'.

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<sup>125</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 11 April, 11 June, 29 July, 29 August, 3 November 1933

<sup>126</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 29 July, 14 October 1933; Tierra y Libertad, 11 August, 20, 27 October 1933



Indeed, Solidaridad Obrera explained that 'we must take advantage of all revolutionary conjunctures to free the prisoners, as it is immense [and] magnificent to break the old chains and open the iron gates so that the incarcerated can leave full of pleasure and hope towards their long-awaited freedom'.<sup>127</sup>

There is evidence that the judicial terror of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* did encourage some internees to accept the anarchist creed and define themselves as libertarians. Further proof that the propaganda drive of the anarchists was not without success, was a letter sent to Solidaridad Obrera by a group of 'common' prisoners in which they attacked the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* as the law 'denies progress, kills the freedom of thought and in its name many men are kidnapped without ever having broken the law'. Inside the jails the struggle for decent conditions transcended the division between 'social' prisoners detained for union or anti-capitalist activities and 'common' detainees, conventionally seen as 'criminals' and 'delinquents'. United in struggle, both sets of prisoners organised protests against the quality of food in the Model jail, a campaign that extended into a protest against the use of solitary confinement and culminated in the storming of the punishment cells. Meanwhile, in October a mixed group of 300 internees held in Barcelona declared a hunger strike for better conditions.<sup>128</sup>

Growing discontent with the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was most graphically registered by a series of risings in prisons and in concentration camps. In Mataró, prisoners interned under the law attacked their guards with potato knives, overpowering them. They destroyed the jail, the immediate source of their torment, before order was re-established with the arrival of a contingent of *Asaltos* and Civil Guard. The CNT praised the 'desperate heroism' of the insurgents, whom it regarded as a 'mass of unfortunates, caught in police swoops', whose 'moral energy' provided 'an example of militant protest, far more effective than any platonic gesture'. Solidaridad Obrera also observed that this was just the 'beginning' of the struggle, promising that 'the

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<sup>127</sup> García Oliver, El eco, pp.104-110; Alba and Casasús, Diàlegs, p.80; Salut, Vivers, pp.67-68; Solidaridad Obrera, 16 September 1932, 18 August, 14 October 1933

<sup>128</sup> Various, El movimiento libertario, p.169; Solidaridad Obrera, 21 September, 14, 19 October 1933, 29 January 1935

concentration camps will be the theatre of similar scenes'. This pledge was confirmed in the following years by sporadic uprisings of internees in the purpose built Can Tunis concentration camp, which was severely damaged on more than one occasion. Similar scenes occurred in the iniquitous caverns of the monarchy, like the Santa María del Mar prison in Cádiz. Meanwhile, in Puigcerdà, a mountain town on the Catalan-French border, only a large contingent of Civil Guard prevented enraged locals from storming the gaol following news that prisoners had been tortured.<sup>129</sup>

The brutal conditions inside the camps provided fertile ground for these protests. In an article entitled 'With the clients of the *Ley de Vagos*', Jacinto Toryho, perhaps the most talented investigative trade union journalist of his times, gained access to an unnamed concentration camp. Toryho described in harrowing detail the daily life in squalid human dustbins with windowless punishment cells and meals of 'stew made from rubbish and slime', homosexual gang rapes, clinical depression and psychiatric illness. In the view of Toryho, the 'asocial' characters against whom the law was invoked constituted a minority of internees in these 'centres for epidemic infections and collective degradation', while the 'majority' of detainees were simply unemployed workers. Solidaridad Obrera also focused on the 'humid and infected' prison in Mataró and the barbaric Santa María del Mar, which provided a punishment of bad food, deficient clothing and vicious guards, a régime that regularly produced outbreaks of insanity and attempted suicides among internees. Life was little better in the purpose-built camps. According to *cenetista* internees the Can Tunis concentration camp was a 'authentic inferno' imposed on 'rebel workers' and street vendors rather than pimps and drug pushers. Another *cenetista* temporarily interned in the camp on the Barcelona waterfront in the spring of 1934 described the filthy conditions that converted detainees into the 'living dead'. He also reported on an abysmal health situation which had led to two deaths in three months simply because the authorities failed to act on doctors' recommendations that sick internees should be hospitalised.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> L'Opinió, 2 November 1933; Solidaridad Obrera, 12 July, 3 November 1933; Las Noticias, 15 August 1933, 5-6, 24 May, 25 June 1934

<sup>130</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 10 March, 5 October, 3 November 1933, 28 August 1934; ¡Rebelión!, 2 March 1934

## 5.6. 'Death to the bourgeois Republic'

The authoritarian guise assumed by the Republic after the January 1933 rising, combined with the repression of the Generalitat, the official clamp-down on the CNT and the emergence of the *Escamots*, inspired a massive outpouring of frustration among grass-roots *cenetistas*. This groundswell of opinion was instrumental in transforming the benevolent apoliticism of 1931 into a vociferous anti-Republicanism. This culminated in the 'electoral strike' ('Huelga electoral') of November 1933.

One week after the January 1933 rising, with the repression in full flight, a manifesto from the CNT National Committee testified that under the Republic civil rights and collective freedoms were 'empty words', as hollow as in the days of the monarchy. As Solidaridad Obrera explained, 'legalistic or not, today more than ever, all governments are class instruments of repression', geared to 'pacify the spirits' of the proletariat. The *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* deepened anti-Republican perspectives, even prompting a curious nostalgia for the dictator, when Solidaridad Obrera mused that 'Primo de Rivera would never have approved a law so reactionary and cruel'. This law was a 'fascist experiment with a democratic label', 'social-fascism' and 'legalised dictatorship', consistent with the social policy of the Republic of 'police stations, prisons and courts' which had produced 'a pyramid of dead and a nation converted into a prison'.<sup>131</sup>

By the summer of 1933, with the Generalitat relentlessly squeezing the CNT, the Barcelona Local Federation seized on the fact that the ERC, which posed as the most radical of all Republican groupings, was in fact the most assiduous opponent of the Confederation. Solidaridad Obrera dubbed the party 'the deporters of Catalonia', while less eloquently, the L'Opinió group were described simply as 'swine' (*canalla*). Increasingly, the ERC was regarded as an explicitly repressive force, an image that was further strengthened by the violent arrival on the streets of the para-military *Escamots*. Thereafter daily confrontations between labour activists and *Escamots*, either at work, during strikes or in the street, produced a powerful dynamic for the separation of the

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<sup>131</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 15-17, 28, 31 January 1933, 15 June, 2, 16, 28 August 1934; Tierra y Libertad, 1 August, 20 October 1933

proletariat from the Generalitat, which was now widely regarded to be sponsoring its own fascist militia of the radicalised petit bourgeoisie and pruning civil rights to Italian and German levels.<sup>132</sup>

The struggle against the *Escamots* became embroiled with the abstention campaign of the CNT in the November 1933 elections. This was a decisive moment in the political history of the 1930s as the quasi-fascist CEDA posed a real threat to the nominally left Republican parties who had ruled during the so-called 'bienio reformista', the first two-and-a-half years of the Republic.<sup>133</sup> Channelling the frustration of those who had remained socially excluded during these years, Jaume Balius attacked the 'psychotic nationalism' of the Generalitat and its policy of labelling those operatives temporarily surplus to the requirements of the Catalan bourgeoisie as 'outsiders', which, he maintained, promised to convert Catalonia into a concentration camp. For Balius, there was nothing to choose between the various electoral options; he maintained that Macià now embodied 'the initial premise' of Catalan fascism, the 'leader of the Catalan bourgeoisie' who had 'betrayed' the Spanish Revolution in 1931 with his 'false promises as friend of the poor'. In the eyes of Balius, Macià's parochial nationalism had failed like that the Irish Republicans after World War One. Drawing an analogy between the national struggles in Catalonia and Ireland, Balius claimed that when 'L'Avi' betrayed the Catalan Republic in April 1931 he ceased to be 'the Catalan de Valera', becoming instead 'the Catalan Cosgrave', the 'guarantor of the bourgeois political order', an 'infernal abortion'.<sup>134</sup>

This view was shared by the BOC who, though far more sensitive to the progressive, anti-centralist content of Catalan national demands than the anarchists, nevertheless juxtaposed its own vision of 'proletarian Catalonia' to that of the 'bourgeois Catalonia'. Since the Generalitat had won over sections of the capitalist class the BOC maintained that there was 'little difference' between the two major parties of Catalan politics, both of which it accused as tools of big business and a 'prop for the counter-

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<sup>132</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14-15 January, 2-3 August 1933

<sup>133</sup> The best description of the rise of the CEDA is to be found in Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.92-130

<sup>134</sup> *El Luchador*, 28 July 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 July, 4 August, 29 October, 15 November 1933

revolution', which had made the Catalan flag 'synonymous with scabbing'. In the words of La Batalla, 'the Esquerra and the Lliga represent the two wings of the Catalan bourgeoisie, two sides of the same coin'. Moreover, in the view of the Bloc, both parties harboured fascist tendencies: the only difference between Cambó and Macià was that the former, as a 'captain of finance', was 'more modern' in comparison with the 'feudal gentleman' who led the Esquerra.<sup>135</sup>

In its campaign for the November elections, the Esquerra resorted to brazen cynicism in the hope it could revive its tarnished image and attract working class votes. The fulcrum of this strategy was the publication of Mall, a 'workerist' newspaper that aimed to recapture the spirit of the spring of 1931 with the promise of a 'return to the primitive revolutionary spirit and to move honestly towards the implantation of thoroughly workerist reforms...reforms that with cries of pain and hunger the proletariat of Catalonia is demanding'. Typifying the short-term expediency of ERC 'workerism', Mall was published only for the duration of the electoral campaign and it ceased publishing immediately before the poll.<sup>136</sup>

Another similarity with the 1931 elections was that again the BOC advanced an exclusively proletarian platform, only to be stubbornly denounced as 'Muscovite fascism' by the anarchists who tarred all 'the bandits of politics' with the same brush. Moreover, in a significant escalation of anarchist anti-communism, *faistas* attacked a number of BOC electoral rallies, clashing with the GABOC, the Bloc defence squads. Unlike 1931, however, instead of passing the initiative to the petit bourgeoisie, the abstentionist stance of the CNT 'electoral strike' favoured the right. In the Spanish parliament a coalition of the opportunist Radicals, backed by the authoritarian CEDA, was swept to power. In Barcelona, the victory of the right in November 1933 was no less complete and the Bloque nacional de derechas, the electoral alliance of the various incarnations of the Spanish right, attained 15 deputies, the same number as the reactionary Lliga. In

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<sup>135</sup> La Batalla, 6 July, 3 August, 21 September, 7 December 1933; Adelante, 3, 12, 16, 19 November 1933

<sup>136</sup> Mall, 7, 14, 21, 28 October, 4, 11, 18 November 1933

comparison, the *Coalició d'esquerres catalanes*, which included the ERC, ACR and the PNRE, attained only 19 deputies in the Catalan capital.<sup>137</sup>

Revolutionary élitism and political confusion were the common denominators of the 'electoral strike'. The same year as the German labour movement fell prey to Nazism, the CNT-FAI blocked all united anti-fascist action. Instead, the anarchists directed their fury against what they regarded as the proven fascism of their enemies, be they *treintistas*, the socialists, the Republicans or *bloquistas*, all of whom were seen by the libertarians as variants of authoritarianism. The danger of the far right was also underestimated by the racial assumptions of the anarchists about the quintessential 'libertarian spirit' of the Iberian people. By contrast, the libertarians attributed Hitler's success in Germany to the fact that 'at the heart of every German there is a ferment of imperialism and a classic spirit of revenge'. Further evidence of the uniformed triumphalism of the anarchists came when *Solidaridad Obrera* claimed that libertarians were responsible for the burning of the Reichstag.<sup>138</sup>

There were two underlying premises behind the 'electoral strike'. Firstly, as *Solidaridad Obrera* explained, 'fascism is not beaten with the ballot box but in the street. It is a problem of force that will be eliminated by force'. If a rightist triumph 'opened the door to fascism', the anarchists promised that the 'iron front' of the CNT-FAI would crush it and destroy the Republican parliament. Secondly, even if the right lost the elections, significant abstention in the 'political comedy' would be taken as a mandate to begin the 'anarchist revolutionary experience'. Before the vote, these two axioms were recurring themes at a series of monster amnesty rallies, some of which were the biggest ever seen in Republican Barcelona. The 'Nosotros' group played a prominent part in the 'electoral strike' and 90,000 workers in Clot heard Durruti, himself recently released from jail, launch an impassioned plea for the amnesty of the 9,000 workers then imprisoned in Spain. Displaying his characteristic revolutionary zeal, Durruti finished his

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<sup>137</sup> *Adelante*, 4 November 1933; *La Batalla*, 9 November 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21-29 October, 5, 14 November 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 17 November 1933; Isidre Molas, *El sistema de partidos políticos en Cataluña, 1931-1936*, Barcelona, 1974, pp.157-161

<sup>138</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1, 10 February, 1 March, 22 September, 12, 15, 17 October, 23 November 1933; *La Revista Blanca*, 15 November 1933

speech by imploring the crowd to 'create factory committees, action groups, spread the idea that we have the right to everything!' Days later, a Tierra y Libertad rally that attracted an 'uncontainable human wave' of some 100,000 people was told by Francisco Ascaso that repressive laws like the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* underlined the failure of the Republic. Ascaso continued, explaining that the only option left was for the CNT, 'the hope of the international proletariat and the disinherited of the world', to pass 'death sentence' on the state and make its revolution 'in the street'. Durruti closed the meeting, with a typically rousing conclusion: 'we have already talked for too long: it is the time for action...Seize what belongs to us!...The world awaits our bulldozing revolution'.<sup>139</sup>

News of the accession of the right to power in Madrid and that there had been a negligible turnout at the polls in libertarian strongholds, was greeted by the anarchists as evidence that a 'revolutionary situation' had arrived. In a series of rallies there were apocalyptic prophecies of the growing 'revolutionary hurricane' that would herald the 'final battle against fascism'. More passionately, 'Boy', a prominent Barcelona *faísta*, implored the Clot anarchist youth to 'smash' their enemies, because 'if we want to stay alive, there is no other solution than to hurl ourselves against them, stamping over them and passing across their corpses'. In anticipation of action, fly posters were placed throughout proletarian districts advising women and children to remain indoors as 'the men of strong will' began the fight for freedom. Finally, the Catalan FAI issued a call to arms to 'all anarchists, whether in the FAI or not', to set out on the 'road to revolution'. This was followed by a manifesto from the Catalan CNT Regional Committee addressed 'to all workers in the Catalan region', advising the proletariat to make the revolution, because 'tomorrow no longer exists'.<sup>140</sup>

In the days immediately after the elections the Confederal Defence Committees spearheaded a strategy of tension, producing a wave of gun and bomb attacks on the various army barracks in the city. This coincided with a strike of the CNT tram workers which, from the beginning, had been accompanied by daily bombs on tram lines. The

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<sup>139</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 22 October, 1, 7-10, 17, 23 November, 1-2 December 1933; Tierra y Libertad, 24 November, 1 December 1933; La Revista Blanca, 30 November 1933

<sup>140</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 11, 16, 18 November 1933; Adelante, 23 November 1933; Fortitud, 31 December 1933; Tierra y Libertad, 24 November 1933

tactics of the *grupistas*, which included bomb attacks on factories in and around, busy city streets, were increasingly indiscriminate. An explosion on El Paral·lel was heard all across the city, while a bomb at a tram station seriously injured a number of printers who had just finished a night shift, killing one. The next day another huge bomb killed a soldier and injured eight workers who happened to be nearby.<sup>141</sup>

On December 8 the *faístas* made their move. The ranks of the insurgents were swelled by a large jail break of anarchists and 'common' criminals from the Cel·lular jail. However, the authorities had been forewarned of the anarchist action by rumours of an incipient rising which had been circulating for an entire month. Before the rising was declared the newly formed Radical government in Madrid imposed martial law, suspending constitutional guarantees throughout Spain, banning CNT unions, press and cultural associations and ordered wholesale detentions of the visible figures of the Confederal organisation, including Durruti, the main organiser of the mobilisation. The Barcelona authorities also left nothing to chance. On December 4 martial law was declared under the terms of the *Ley de orden público* and all the major CNT unions were closed. Meanwhile, the Civil Guard established machine gun posts on key tram routes and in strategic parts of the city. The presence of the security forces in the proletarian belt of the city was also increased and students from the Generalitat police college were drafted into action. In Terrassa the rising was effectively decapitated with the preventive arrest of 70 *faístas*.

Despite these setbacks, the insurrectionaries tapped the contradictions and tensions that had accumulated in the proletarian periphery of the city and in rapidly expanded areas of Barcelona, l'Hospitalet, El Prat de Llobregat and Granollers, the rising became a reality on the streets.<sup>142</sup> The centres of the rising in Catalonia were the

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<sup>141</sup> *Adelante*, 19, 23-24, 28 November, 2-3 December 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 19, 21, 23, 28, 30 November, 3, 5 December 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3 December 1933

<sup>142</sup> My interpretation of the December 1933 rising and its aftermath is based on *La Vanguardia*, *La Veu de Catalunya*, *Adelante*, *L'Opinió*, 5-22 December 1933; *Justicia Social*, 16 December 1933; *Comercio y Navegación*, December 1933; *Communiques from Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 8-10 December 1933 (AHLL); *La Humanitat*, 15 December 1933; *Report from the Mayor of l'Hospitalet to Lluís Companys, the President of the Generalitat*, 29 December 1933 (AHLL); *FO371/17427/W14410/116/41*: Report from Sir G. Grahame, 12 December 1933 (PRO); *FO371/17427/W14776/116/41*: Report from Consul-General King, 12 December 1933 (PRO)



CNT strongholds in the capital, such as Poble Nou, Sant Martí and Sants, and the highly combustible areas of Collblanc and La Torrassa in l'Hospitalet. Indeed, the anarchists of l'Hospitalet came of age in the December 1933 rising, setting up barricades and establishing *foci* of action from where they attacked military targets and attempted to march on Barcelona. This revolutionary willingness was commended by Badius as 'the insurrectionary power and the rebel fury of men converted into beasts by a regime of infamy and oppression'.<sup>143</sup> However, this exclusively anarchist-led general strike carried few chances of success and although the major factories in l'Hospitalet remained empty, in Barcelona pickets faced insurmountable difficulties imposing the stoppage, especially in factories where the dissident communists or anarcho-syndicalists accounted for the majority of the workforce. While the anarchists successfully forced many workers at gun-point to down tools, there were numerous reports of clashes between *faístas* and rival groups of *bloquistas* and *treintistas*. In their frustration with workers who refused to endorse their revolution, the FAI adopted its own 'scorched earth' policy, destroying plant and bombing factories, sometimes without even troubling to evacuate non-CNT operatives.

Increasingly, the struggle of the *grupistas* was the battle of an isolated rearguard. Following two days of sporadic street clashes the centres of the revolt in Barcelona, like Poble Nou, were quiet. Meanwhile, in Sants and the adjoining areas of l'Hospitalet, there was nothing more than a few sporadic guerrilla actions, alongside acts of proletarian 'self-help' like looting and revenge attacks, presumably by street vendors, on Santa Eulàlia market. With the return of an uncertain peace, the authorities were uneasy, shaken by the scale of support for the rising in l'Hospitalet. This nervousness was apparent in the behaviour of the security forces and there were several shootings, some fatal, of innocent workers on the streets. Repression also quickly gathered pace and hundreds of workers were detained, including militants from all proletarian organisations, as the security forces launched a series of *ràtzies* in working class districts. This culminated in the occupation of the various groups of *Cases Barates* and

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<sup>143</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 April 1934

l'Hospitalet and prolonged house-to-house searches by hundreds of members of the police, backed up by army and cavalry detachments.<sup>144</sup>

The authorities and business groups were outraged by the new 'criminal attack' on Catalonia by 'degenerate immigrants'. L'Opinió declared it was time 'to finish with the FAI once and for all', ending its 'internal war', as this is 'the unanimous will of the citizenry and because the longer the authorities leave the FAI intact, the greater the chance that the FAI will do away with the citizenry'. Advocating 'order and security', the 'Lluhíns' were gravitating towards a Republican dictatorship. This authoritarianism was shared by the USC, who declared that 'the first task which we must realise is to wipe out the FAI and all the *faístas* using all means possible, without hesitation, without pity and without reservations'. Employers' associations echoed this repressive mood, as did the shopkeepers of the Federació Mercantil Catalana, who declared that repression was 'insufficient' because it was simply reactive; instead, 'it is necessary to prevent the development of revolutions, expelling the latent state of anarchic sickness from our city'. Amid growing bi-partisanship on the issue of order, La Veu de Catalunya, L'Opinió, Justícia Social and La Humanitat all converged on the need for a complete ban of the CNT, a unity summed up in the slogan of the Lliga: 'All united against the FAI!'

Far from vanquishing fascism, therefore, 'revolutionary gymnastics' and anarchist terrorism had gone a considerable way towards producing an authoritarian reaction. Given that it had a membership of just over 10,000 in 1933, 1,400 of whom were in Catalonia, it was lunacy for the FAI to attempt to make the revolution alone. Moreover, the majority of the Iberian proletariat was not anarchist and, moreover, even in its Barcelona stronghold there were probably no more than 300 *faístas*, and only a fraction of the 150,000 workers in the city had followed their 'revolutionary gymnastics'.<sup>145</sup> The 'cycle of insurrections' proved that despite their reckless bravery, the limited supporters of the FAI were never going to defeat the forces of the state. Instead, given the ideological mosaic of the labour movement, it was axiomatic that only united proletarian action could guarantee revolutionary success. However, the *faístas* refused to meditate

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<sup>144</sup> Adelante, 5 January 1934

<sup>145</sup> Balcells, Crisis, p.196, n.22; Huertas Claveria, Obrers, p.243; Miró, Cataluña, p.49

on their failures and those anarchists in Madrid and Asturias who favoured unity in action with the communists and the *treintistas* were marginalised by the sectarian Catalans, who continued to dominate the CNT. Thus, soon after the December action the CNT National Committee resumed its attack on its 'fascist' enemies within the labour movement, boasting that the CNT-FAI was, 'as before, at the head of the revolution and in the front line against the fascist threat'. Meanwhile, Montseny, although a spectator during the risings, verified the 'revolutionary gymnastics' as 'these revolutions make the people ready', advising 'Death must not concern us'.<sup>146</sup>

In many ways, the FAI was playing a role similar to that exercised by the ultra-leftist KPD in the German labour movement before the Nazi take-over. In fact, the impact of the anarchists was even worse, as they synthesised the putschism of the KPD of the early 1920s with the divisive sectarianism of the FAI. The balance of two-and-a-half years of *faísmo* could not have been more nefarious: the anarchists had attacked the PSOE and the dissident communists more than the bourgeoisie; the FAI had split and divided the CNT, depleting its power in futile clashes with the state. Moreover, the 'revolutionary gymnastics' invited a ferocious repression which jeopardised the future of the entire labour movement, depressing collective organisations by undervaluing the traditional syndical role of unions which the anarchists preferred to utilise simply as springboards for their futile putsches. Most alarming of all was the substitution of mass union action with the vanguard violence of small groups of *faístas*. While this 'substitutionism' presupposed a certain amount of isolation between the anarchist élite and the mass of workers, the growing disregard of the FAI for the lives of ordinary workers was creating the first signs of a popular apathy that had a dangerous parallel with the period before the 1923 coup.

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<sup>146</sup> *Adelante*, 19, 30 December 1933; *La Revista Blanca*, 28 December 1933

## Chapter 6: The Militarisation of Anarchism

### 6.1. The Generalitat and Law-and-Order

The Spanish parliamentary elections of November 1933 created a left-right divide between the Madrid and Barcelona governments because although the right was in power in Madrid, the Esquerra remained the majority party in the Generalitat. For those Republicans who were petrified that democracy was being taken over by its enemies, Catalonia was the 'bulwark of the Republic'. At the end of 1933, and much to the chagrin of the anti-*Catalaniste* right in Madrid, the Catalan government enhanced its powers by finally assuming responsibility for public order under the terms of the Autonomy Statute. This meant the disappearance of the four Civil Governors who had previously been appointed by the Madrid Interior Ministry in the four Catalan provinces. Moreover, the Civil Guard came to receive its orders from the newly formed Comissaria d'Ordre Públic of the Generalitat.<sup>1</sup>

Armed with its new powers, the Generalitat intensified its drive against the CNT-FAI. The repression that bore down on the Confederation since the advent of the 'revolutionary gymnastics' in early 1932 reached its peak in Catalonia in 1934. This was hardly surprising given the appointment of the reactionary duo of Dencàs and Badia as Generalitat Interior Minister and Barcelona Police Chief respectively in December 1933. Under the aegis of Dencàs and Badia, the Comissaria d'Ordre Públic drafted *Escamots* into the Catalan police force and the Generalitat imposed blanket legal and police restrictions on the CNT, whose unions were effectively criminalised. Union centres and offices were closed, the CNT was banned from holding meetings, militants were prevented from collecting dues and syndical committees languished in *de facto* clandestinity, forced underground by a rigorous campaign of repression aimed at annihilating the Confederation. The mere suspicion that workers were participating in 'illegal' union affairs was sufficient grounds for arrest and it was not uncommon for *cenetistas* out strolling to be picked up for 'clandestine assembly'. Similarly, the police directed their attention to the bars, especially those in the Barri xino, where proletarian activists met both to discuss politics and to relax during their free time. Between January

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<sup>1</sup> Balcells, *Historia*, p.256

1 and October 4, 1934, 'La Tranquilidad', a bar popular with anarchists and workers on El Paral·lel, was raided five times by police, leading to the arrest of 161 customers, the majority of whom were 'considered by police to be highly dangerous individuals due to their records'. This repeated police harassment finally forced the closure of 'La Tranquilidad'. Meanwhile, when a raid on 'La Tranquilidad' yielded what Police Chief Badia regarded as a poor catch of anarchists, he ordered the random detention of workers who happened to be then walking along El Paral·lel.<sup>2</sup>

The tough stance of the Generalitat provided an opportunity for employers to turn the clock back in the factories. The victimisation of militants was widespread, as employers refused to recognise CNT *bolsa de trabajo* and reintroduced piece-work and other forms of casualised labour that had ended in many industries following the syndical offensive of the summer of 1931. The disarray in Confederal ranks was so tremendous that at the first clandestine meeting of the Catalan CNT Regional Committee after December 1933 rising only a solitary delegate attended from outside Barcelona. In a climate of defeat, the l'Hospitalet union junta complained that dozens of activists were deserting the cause. The anarchist groups were also affected by this despondency. All that remained of a once flourishing network of Ateneus, rationalist schools and community groups in l'Hospitalet was the La Torrassa-based 'Peña de Amigos del Arte Escénico', which organised plays, cinema sessions and other cultural events. Barcelona revealed a similar picture. The once buoyant Ateneu Llibertari in Sants was left with 'a reduced group of comrades', while in Barceloneta the anarchists spoke of a 'feeling of nostalgia' for past days of struggle. Many other anarchist groups admitted the 'demoralisation' within their ranks. The disruption of the CNT-FAI press was no less pronounced. Following the December insurrection, the Generalitat did not allow Solidaridad Obrera to reappear until April 1934. The editorial boards of Solidaridad Obrera and Tierra y Libertad were periodically interned without trial. The same illegal measure was employed to clean the streets of *cenetistas* and those who figured on a 'special census of dangerous people' that the Catalan authorities had drawn up after

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<sup>2</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 6-7, 11 July, 3 August, 8 September 1934; Adelante, 26-28 January, 11, 22 February 1934; La Vanguardia, 11 January, 4-6 February, 1 March, 19 June, 4 October 1934

November 1933. A new daily section in Solidaridad Obrera entitled 'The traffic of prisoners at the Commissariat for Public Order' testified to the rising tide of repression and in the first ten months of 1934 this section charted the fate of just under 1,000 *cenetistas* and *faistas* in Barcelona province alone who, though detained for no specified judicial reason, spent an average six to eight months interned without trial. The bursting jails of the Catalan capital meant that detainees faced new problems of overcrowding, in addition to the customary mistreatment, which was confirmed by more than one commission of independent physicians. Adding hardship to indignity, upon release, the internees were often jobless and, in many cases, homeless.<sup>3</sup>

The appointment of two rigid authoritarian figures like Dencàs and Badia during a time of institutional change within the security forces underlined the heavy hand of the Generalitat on law-and-order. The first job Dencàs set himself was to purge the Catalan police. Highlighting the equivocal stance of the Madrid authorities towards police reform during the first two years of the Republic, a confidential report commissioned by the Generalitat at the end of 1933 suspected that 90% of officers held anti-*Catalaniste* and monarchical attitudes. However, this was perhaps not so surprising, given that the last Chief Commissioner of the Barcelona force before the transferral of powers to the Generalitat was Pere Coll i Llac, a former member of Unión Patriótica, the pseudo-fascist party formed by the dictator in the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> The Generalitat, therefore, was convinced of the need to *Catalanise* the police force.

In a further reorganisation of the security forces Dencàs and Badia took the controversial step of reorganising the Sometent, the highly suspect militia. Control of the Sometent was given to Josep Badia, the brother of the Barcelona Police Chief, who purged the force of monarchists and armed recruits from radical *Catalaniste* youth

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<sup>3</sup> L'Opinió, 12 January 1934; La Vanguardia, 25, 28, 30 January, 22 February, 7 June, 18 July, 28 September 1934; La Batalla, 18 January, 7 April 1934; Solidaridad Obrera, 3-4, 6, 8, 10, 13-14, 18, 24 July, 1, 9, 12-16, 18, 23-24, 29, 31 August, 2, 8, 16, 22 September 1934; Adelante, 19 December 1933, 26 January 1934; La Publicitat, 8 April 1934; Abad de Santillán, Memorias, pp.192, 220; John Brademas, Anarcosindicalismo y revolución en España (1930-1937), l'Esplugues de Llobregat, 1974, p.133, n.25

<sup>4</sup> Josep Dencàs, El 6 d'octubre des del Palau de Governació, (2nd edition) Barcelona, 1979, pp.48, 52. After the fall of the dictator Coll i Llac literally bought his way into *Catalaniste* circles, funding La Humanitat, the paper of Companys: Ivern i Salvà, Esquerra, vol.2, p.482.

groups, especially the quasi-fascist *Escamots*. The Sometent was highly popular with the Catalan authorities because such a volunteer force suited its shallow pockets. Moreover, the 'few thousand well-armed and honourable Republicans' in the Sometent were vehement supporters of law-and-order in autonomous Catalonia and they solemnly pledged their 'sincere love for the nation' and their readiness to contribute to 'the drive to persecute robbers, murderers and wreckers'. With the Barcelona police contingent standing at just over 400, the volunteer Sometent, like the *Escamots* and the regular forces of Civil Guard and the *Asaltos*, were integral to the maintenance of public order.<sup>5</sup>

The reorganisation of the police was not simply about *Catalanising* the force, however. The Generalitat also hoped to succeed where the Republicans had largely failed between 1931 and 1933 and alter the public perception of the security forces. The notorious Jefatura Superior de Policia on Vía Laietana, the scene of torture during the monarchy, the dictatorship and, at times, during the first two years of the Republic, underwent a cosmetic name change. The Generalitat placed equal importance on its plans for modernising law enforcement. These amounted to the establishment of more effective structures of social control which, the authorities hoped, could withstand the strains placed on public order and enable the police to neutralise the contradictions produced by the development of the capitalist city. Accordingly, the ERC aimed to implement a series of mechanisms that would allow the authorities greater awareness of public life. These measures, including new methods of surveillance and a strengthening of night-time police patrols and the creation of a new security service to keep close surveillance on the activities of foreigners in Barcelona, aroused much to the excitement of the Republican press. It was also announced that long-standing plans for a national identity card scheme would be implemented. In the interim, however, stiff penalties were introduced for those who did not have their documentation in order, including incarceration under the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *L'Opinió*, 24, 28 March, 3, 13 April 1934; Balcells, Introduction to Dencàs, *El 6 d'octubre*, p. 13; *La Vanguardia*, 14 July 1934

<sup>6</sup> Jaume Balús, *Octubre catalán*, Barcelona, n.d., p. 6; *Las Noticias*, 11 May 1934; *L'Opinió*, 31 March 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 4 September 1934; Francesc Escofet, *De una derrota a una victoria: 6 de octubre de 1934 - 19 de julio de 1936*, Barcelona, 1984, pp. 162-163

Another element in the Generalitat plans was an ambitious project for the construction of a network of district police stations. This was intended to bring the police closer to the people by way of community policing and end popular suspicions of the security forces. It is unlikely that the ERC was ignorant of the unwritten assumptions of such a change, namely that community policing carried with it the prospect of generating intelligence, particularly about those districts that had expanded vertiginously since 1914.

However, the Comissaria d'Ordre Públic embraced many of the negative aspects of traditional police tactics. These included the questionable system of intelligence-gathering based on informers, a technique that Republicans had roundly denounced in the past.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this method made a mockery of the claim that the police prevented crime, because the success of the informer system presupposed that the security forces became an accomplice in crime, guaranteeing the criminal life of the *confidant* to allow the informant-criminal continual access to other lawbreakers.

However, by the time the Generalitat acquired responsibility for public order in 1933-1934, the chances of improving relations between police and policed were significantly slimmer than in 1931. This can be seen in a series of connected ways. Not only had 'Republican fever' abated but, by 1934 the full effects of the Wall Street Crash were fully apparent in Iberia, with all the attendant social conflictivity. This rendered a retreat from robust and socially alienating police tactics quite impossible. The intractability of this problem had already been registered inside the Esquerra, as reflected in the rise of the quasi-fascist *Escamots* and the rightwards drift of the ruling Catalan party. Equally, the Generalitat was keen to make the property-owning classes feel that their wealth was fully protected and, therefore, committed its institutions to the emphatic repression of any collective or individual threat to that property. To this end, the Generalitat secured land on the proletarian belt of Barcelona to build more barracks for both the *Asaltos* and the Civil Guard. Finally, as mentioned above, the team selected to head the new police forces effectively precluded amicable relations with the majority of

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<sup>7</sup> *La Publicitat*, 4 April 1934; *L'Opinió*, 13 April 1934



the population. Thus, alongside the authoritarian proclivities of Dencàs and Badia, both of whom were energetically despised by all groups to the left of the Esquerra, Jaume Vachier, an ERC Councillor and Tram owner who caused immense irritation to the CNT during the 1933 transport strike, was made responsible for the Guàrdia urbana. Meanwhile, Caselles, an ex-Civil Guard lieutenant and military officer during the dictatorship, was given one of the top jobs at the Generalitat Comissaria d'Ordre Públic.<sup>8</sup> On balance, therefore, the team assembled by the Generalitat to coach the Catalan security forces seemed far more inclined towards war than peace.

Further evidence of the austere law-and-order agenda of the Generalitat was the absence of any attempt to regulate the activities of private security guards. This was highly controversial because the commercial private sector firms employed many former policemen and soldiers who had been expelled for brutality or indiscipline and were widely suspected by those on the left of having connections with the far right. Nevertheless, private guards continued to be employed by district commercial associations to police the streets by night and prevent break-ins at their premises. They were also recruited by capitalists to guard workshops, both during and out of working hours, a role that earned them the hatred of operatives due to their readiness to harass trade unionists and check on the practices of workers.

Civil rights abuses also continued in an untrammelled way. Spot-searches of 'suspicious' individuals increased, as did the use of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*, both against people with penal records for 'crimes against property' and 'dangerous individuals' believed by officialdom to have 'criminal tendencies'. Echoing the discourse of the monarchical authorities of yesteryear, Dencàs justified internment without trial of all 'dangerous elements', a concept increasingly seen as coterminous with immigrants and those with 'bad records'. The Generalitat persisted in relying on internment without trial, using this to detain suspects who had been released by judges on grounds of insufficient evidence. A series of abuses was perpetrated against labour activists. The BOC alleged that a wave of detentions of its militants, who were taken to police headquarters,

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<sup>8</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 28 March 1934; *L'Opinió*, 24 March 1934; *Adelante*, 2 March 1934

photographed and registered, before being released without charge, was part of the policy of the Generalitat to construct comprehensive files on proletarian activists. There were also complaints that the police were 'planting' incriminating evidence on militants. When a group of *cenetistas* complained to Inspector Tarragona of the political police about the daily harassment that threatened their jobs, accommodation and families, the members of the delegation, including Francisco Ascaso, received letters signed by Badia on police department note paper that advised them to leave Catalonia 'within a week' if they didn't like police methods. At the same time, the right of association was guaranteed to the small numbers of fascists in Barcelona, reinforcing the misgivings of the revolutionary left that Dencàs and Badia were following a barely hidden authoritarian agenda. This was apparently confirmed by the discriminatory workings of the law, for while private security guards sometimes beat up *cenetistas* with impunity, when members of the CNT roughed up a member of Estat Català Dencàs intervened to ensure that the individuals responsible received a heavy punishment. There were similar discrepancies in sentencing and at a time when working class militants were receiving jail sentences of a year upwards for possession of a firearm, a number of arms cases involving rightists were dropped by the authorities.<sup>9</sup>

The notoriously poor discipline of security forces failed to improve under the Generalitat. Authorised to carry small arms at all times for reasons of personal safety, the official image of the police as paragons of civic virtue were scotched by a steady flow of reports of their drunken violence, during which they occasionally drew weapons on unsuspecting members of the public. On one occasion, a night-watchman was threatened with a pistol after he disturbed an *Asalto* making love in the city park in the early hours of the morning. Meanwhile, despite assurances that only 'honourable citizens' and reliable Republicans entered the paramilitary Sometent, it was evident that a large number of monarchists remained in the militia and that their moral condition was far from certain. On at least one occasion, *Sometentistes* were discovered drunk while on patrol. There

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<sup>9</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1, 3, 7, 10, 28 July, 4 August, 9 September 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 9 August, 19 September, 3 October 1934; *Las Noticias*, 11, 30 May 1934; *L'Opinió*, 2, 21 January, 31 March 1934; *La Publicitat*, 4 April 1934; *La Humanitat*, 8 July 1934; *Adelante*, 26-27 January, 23-28 February, 3 March 1934; Liarte, *El camino*, pp.221-225; *La Revista Blanca*, 11 May 1934

were also cases of off-duty *Sometentistes* provoking disputes in bars, during which, like the police, they were not averse to brandishing their side-arms. Another *Sometentiste* settled a professional argument by shooting his employer dead, constituting a rare example in which acts of violence by members of the security forces went to court.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of the fractured social consensus of 1930s Barcelona the traditional, objective function of the police as the violent defender of the law led to new levels of brutality. This reality could not be masked by the superficial name changes of the security forces. Independent doctors regularly confirmed that detainees leaving the *Comissaria d'Ordre Públic* had been brutally mistreated, the same state violence which for years had been employed to push activists away from the labour movement. In fact, it quickly became apparent that under the *Generalitat*, the Catalan police were adding a new viciousness to the dark history of policing in Iberia. According to anarchists and communists who had dealings with the Spanish and Catalan police forces that policed Barcelona during the Republic, as well as their monarchical predecessors, the autonomous Catalan force established in 1934 was the most vicious of the three.<sup>11</sup>

New police methods were perfected by the Badia brothers, who quickly revealed themselves to be a merciless and vengeful pair who, in the view of one of their contemporaries, 'behaved like perfect savages'. Known for his daring exploits as 'Capità Collons' to his friends and admirers, Miquel was a middle-class adventurer, highly representative of the new police whose institutional ethos was very much his own making. Badia had a 'hands-on' attitude to his job as Police Chief, and although there was no formal requirement for him to leave his office, he nourished his reputation for bravery, regularly setting out, gun-in-hand, to join the front line during shoot-outs or bank robberies and picking up a number of gunshot wounds in the process. Unrelenting

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<sup>10</sup> *La Revista Blanca*, 11 May 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 23 September 1934

<sup>11</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 6-7, 31 July 1934; *Balies*, *Octubre catalán*, p.10; García Oliver, *El eco*, p.225; *La Publicitat*, 10 April 1934. 'Interrogation' techniques were introduced whereby punches and kicks were administered through pillows, allowing suspects to be pounded for longer, while reducing the risk of marking them. Another practice of the Catalan police was the simulated execution of suspects, whereby often after a few days 'softening up' ('police-speak' for the denial of food and sleep) detainees were made to face a wall and told they were about to be shot. To guarantee tension, a pistol would be cocked in the suspects' ear. Finally, an unloaded pistol would be cocked from behind, while another policeman would launch a stone or a punch or kick at the body of the detainee who, more often than not, collapsed in a state of physical and mental exhaustion.

in his hatred for lawbreakers, the cruel prejudices of Miquel were exemplified after a shoot-out between police and an armed gang on the Carretera de la Rabassada, when the Barcelona Chief-of-Police ordered that the wounded 'murcianos' should be left without medical treatment. Only after a heated argument with a Civil Guard commandant was an ambulance called to the scene.<sup>12</sup>

Police practises on the streets remained, therefore, both questionable and arbitrary. This was epitomised by the arrest of one worker for 'looking suspiciously' at an *Asalto*. Vachier masterminded a sharp increase in violent attacks on unemployed street traders by the Council police. The zeal of the Generalitat to rout the CNT and establish itself as the unchallenged master of the streets meant that the police, backed by army detachments, periodically occupied and searched working class districts, particularly in the Barri xino and in the peripheral ghettos. In a raid on 'Bar Zaragoza', a well-known *cenetista* haunt, the political police and *Asaltos* smashed the bar up to such an extent that the owner decided not to re-open. Like the paramilitary *Escamots*, the Sometent clearly relished the challenge of a strike and the opportunity it provided to give plebeian upstarts a sound thrashing.<sup>13</sup> The security forces towards caution continued to shoot first and ask questions later. In Clot, a youth running home for his lunch after work was shot in the back and seriously wounded when he failed to respond to a call to halt. The same fate befell two Swedish sailors in the Barri xino, whose linguistic shortcomings led them to be seriously wounded with head and body injuries when they ignored calls from the Catalan police. These extra-limitations coincided with growing concerns on the revolutionary left that Police Chief Badia was recruiting a team of gunmen to murder leading *cenetistas* as part of a murderous 'dirty war' against the CNT.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 August 1934; Alba and Casasús, *Diàlegs*, p.28; *La Vanguardia*, 19, 25 July 1934; *Las Noticias*, 15-18 May 1934; Balius, *Octubre catalán*, p.11

<sup>13</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 30 June, 6, 21, 25, 31 July, 29 August, 7 September 1934; *Adelante*, 22, 30 January 1934. These highly conflictive policing practices led to a law-and-order situation in the proletarian areas whose closest contemporary equivalent would be the radical ANC squatter camps and marginal townships surrounding Johannesburg or some parts of Republican West Belfast.

<sup>14</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 October 1932, 19 July 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 31 March, 5 September 1934. According to Balius, the plan to form a death squad was blocked by the personal intervention of President Companys, who feared the consequences of a return to the 'gun-law' of the early 1920s: Balius, *Octubre catalán*, p.11.

Throughout 1934 a series of killings by the police revealed the reliance of the security forces on naked terror and fuelled suspicions that the security forces had initiated a low-intensity 'shoot-to-kill' policy against 'FAI criminals'. In early 1934, the body of a young *faista* was found on wasteland on the outskirts of Barcelona. Although the dead anarchist had participated in a skirmish between police and *grupistas*, the fact that he died from a single shot from a police revolver suggested that he had been summarily executed. In a separate case, an unarmed *cenetista* was shot and killed in broad daylight by an off-duty policeman in a street on the Sants-Les Corts border. Memories of 1920s police tactics were evoked again when a *grupista* was shot in the back by police, who defended their actions because their unarmed suspect had 'attempted to escape'. Meanwhile, in mid-April police located and ambushed the Italian anarchist Bruno Alpini and his associates near El Paral·lel. In the ensuing gun battle between police and 'The Alpini Gang' over 200 rounds were fired and Alpini was left dead. This was almost certainly the desired goal of the Barcelona police, for Alpini had already assassinated an agent from the political police and, just days before his death, he escaped arrest after disarming a pair of officers and stealing their uniforms.<sup>15</sup>

The death of Alpini, which coincided with the celebrations of the third anniversary of the birth of the Republic, was greeted by *L'Opinió* with 'general satisfaction' at 'the definitive thrashing our police has given the criminals' in the campaign to 'clean-up of Barcelona'. The Republican press provided unflinching support for the police, whose 'undeniable qualities' were praised in the bid to rid the city of the 'criminal classes'. As if egged on by Republican opinion, in the following month two more 'expropriators' were shot dead in Barcelona by the police and several others wounded. No charges were brought against members of the security forces. In an increasingly draconian climate, anonymous manifestos appeared on the streets which, quite probably the work of the *Escamots*, threatened to kill 'two robbers' for every 'citizen' who fell in

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<sup>15</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 23 February, 15-18 April, 17-19 July 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17-20, 25 July, 9 September 1934; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 15 April 1934; *L'Opinió*, 17 April 1934; *El Noticiero Universal*, 16 April 1934. Apart from eliminating Alpini, however, the ambush was anything but a success. Six of the eight expropriators shot their way out of the ambush, leaving one policeman dead and two others critically wounded. The price of converting a busy part of the city into a shooting gallery also resulted in serious wounds to three passers-by.

the 'war against crime'. Although the Esquerra balked at formally re-introducing capital punishment, it had clearly contributed to a state of affairs which justified *force majeure* against illegality and, as Solidaridad Obrera alleged, not without justification, the murderous behaviour of the Catalan police amounted to the *de facto* return of the death penalty.<sup>16</sup>

La Campana de Gràcia congratulated the police for the implacability in the 'pursuit of undesirables' which, it asserted, had led to an 'extraordinary decline' in armed robbery. Meanwhile, La Publicitat and L'Opinió, both of which were always very close barometers of official opinion, bragged that the tough police line had spread 'a wave of panic' in the ranks of the 'expropriators'. This was confirmed in the annual report of the Chief State Prosecutor, which recognised that armed robberies had decreased more significantly in Barcelona than elsewhere in 1934. However, the triumphalism of the Generalitat was premature. Not only did the decrease in armed robberies occur in the context of a very high base level, but it also did not indicate that the police had successfully ended illegality. Firstly, there is evidence that increased policing in the Catalan capital only succeeded in pushing the 'expropriators' out of Barcelona. This was reflected in a rise in the number of bank raids in provincial Catalonia. One team of 'expropriators', recognised as Catalans by their accents, was reported to have raided a bank in the southern Spanish province of Murcia. Secondly, boasts that the criminals were 'licked' proved highly imprudent and were sometimes followed by a new and spectacular round of 'expropriations', which inferred that there was no easy repressive solution to a phenomenon with an essentially socio-economic basis like armed illegality.<sup>17</sup>

The Generalitat police experienced tremendous difficulties in its campaign against the 'expropriators'. In spring 1934 the flight of a series of suspected 'expropriators' who were being trailed by the political police led to widespread beliefs in Generalitat circles

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<sup>16</sup> L'Opinió, 7 March, 17 April 1934; La Publicitat, 18 April 1934; Las Noticias, 20 April 1933, 17-18 May 1934; Solidaridad Obrera, 9 September 1934

<sup>17</sup> La Campana de Gràcia cited in Cucurull, Catalunya, p.229; L'Opinió, 31 March, 1 April 1934; La Publicitat, 12 April 1934; Las Noticias, 9, 20 May, 29 July, 20 September 1934; La Vanguardia, 19, 29, 31 July 1934

that the FAI had its own informants inside the Catalan police. These suspicions were confirmed when the body of a police informant inside the FAI was found gagged and shot on Montjuïc on the very day he had been enlisted by the authorities. Meanwhile, days later, another *faïsta* recruited by the police was found assassinated alongside the work site of La Sagrada Família.<sup>18</sup>

The Generalitat masked its frustrations on law-and-order with the conspiracy theory that monarchist judges in the Barcelona Courts had a policy of releasing 'FAI criminals' and other recidivists to destroy the public peace of Catalonia and bring disrepute on both the Esquerra and autonomous Catalan institutions.<sup>19</sup> These allegations are very difficult to believe, however, especially as Anguera de Sojo, whose hatred of the FAI was well-proven during his spell as Civil Governor, remained one of the leading figures inside the Barcelona law courts. Moreover, both before the implementation of the Autonomy Statute and afterwards, the Barcelona judiciary displayed implacable hostility to all so-called 'crimes against property'. During the very period which the Esquerra alleged was a permissive era of judicial laxity, jail terms for armed robbery averaged between 13 and 17 years, while petty cases of unarmed robbery were punished without pity, with sentences averaging around 7 years. One prolific highway robber was given a 240-year sentence, even though he did not wound a single victim. Meanwhile, during the same period, *grupistas* received sentences of between 18-22 years for the possession of explosives, 9 years for firing at the police and 8 years for tram burning.<sup>20</sup>

The manifest exasperation of the security forces and the authorities, and the view that they were being overrun by the 'criminal classes', reflected the problems of a strategy which relied on police repression to reduce phenomena that were actually far more responsive to socio-economic variables outside the control of the police, such as unemployment, low wages and poverty. 1930s Barcelona revealed that punitive panaceas and increased policing did not reduce crime. Not only would it have been exorbitant to

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<sup>18</sup> *La Publicitat*, 4, 11 April 1934

<sup>19</sup> *L'Opinió*, 21 January, 21 April, 1 May, 16 June, 22 September 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 27 September 1934

<sup>20</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 17 March, 8 November, 30 December 1932, 15 December 1933, 3 April, 2 September 1934; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 18, 22, 28 April 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 6 July 1934; *La Publicitat*, 4 January 1935; *Las Noticias*, 2 July 1936

protect all large sums of money in the city with permanent guards but, as shown in the attacks on pay-rolls, mail trains and banks, visible armed protection did not serve as a deterrent against surprise attacks by well equipped and determined 'expropriators'. The reality, therefore, was that in spite of the increases in the security forces since 1931, the talk of the preventive function of the police was an empty myth, largely invoked to justify spending on the security forces.

Contrary to the opinion of the Catalan right and the Madrid centralists, the failings of the police owed nothing to the incompetence of the Generalitat authorities but were weaknesses common to policing in big cities the world over. However, it must also be said that technologically speaking, the Barcelona police remained backward: it was badly motorised and hindered by a rudimentary communication system, which made it impossible for agents to cover the wide range of possible economic targets on offer in a business centre like Barcelona. Meanwhile, the gangs of 'expropriators', especially those with cars at their disposal, could reach their targets, even the banks in the financial heart of the city, and make their escape in a matter of minutes, well before the arrival of the security forces. Ironically, police orders for the requisition of civilian cars to facilitate the 'hot pursuit' of armed gangs were greeted with considerable resistance by the middle class car-owning and order-loving strata of the city.<sup>21</sup>

The illegality of the 1930s also left another professional myth of the security forces in tatters, namely that the police were geared towards crime detection. Contrary to the self-serving claims of the security forces, if 'expropriators' were not detained *in flagrante delicto* it proved very difficult, near impossible, for the police to apprehend them. It is, therefore, no understatement to assert that police intelligence was a contradiction in terms. On a technological level investigative work was inhibited by the absence of forensic, fingerprinting and ballistic procedures and the little detective work effected by the Catalan police was based on the highly laborious and obsolete method devised by French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon in the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> *Adelante*, 9, 21 January, 1934; *Solidaridad*, 18 April 1934

<sup>22</sup> Alphonse Bertillon, *Identification Antropometrique. Instructions signaletiques*, Melum, 1893, 2 vols.; H.T.F. Rhodes, *Alphonse Bertillon*, London, 1956; Trinidad Fernández, *La defensa*, pp.286-298



'science' of *bertillonage* was gloss on the myth that the police actually set about detecting crimes according to deductive investigative skills. Moreover, based on the establishment of common 'distinguishing marks' (*señas de identidad*) between eye-witness accounts and photograph albums of suspects and recidivists, *bertillonage* was ill-suited to apprehending lawbreakers in a densely populated city like Barcelona. This was confirmed by press coverage of street crime which revealed that eye-witnesses, the cornerstone of *bertillonage*, often proved worthless allies in the fight against illegality. In the case of 'expropriations' in banks and other public targets, events occurred suddenly and without warning and were over very quickly. On such occasions, there was a natural tendency for the majority of witnesses who had little or no personal contact with firearms to focus more on the weapons carried by the 'expropriators' than on their distinguishing features. Consequently, many eye-witnesses were incapable of providing a sufficiently detailed description of the 'expropriators' who, for the sake of anonymity, often shielded their faces with trilby hats, raised coat collars or handkerchiefs. As a result, even when the police managed to capture an attacker red-handed, it was notoriously difficult to get witnesses to make a positive identification.<sup>23</sup>

The rarity of crime prevention and detection meant that the bulk of police duties revolved around 'interrogating' suspects who were detained either on the advice of a 'grass' or on the grounds of a previous criminal record. This also explains the tendency of agents to develop the case for the prosecution by extracting a complete confession through the systematic violence of the 'third degree'. The use of violence against prisoners to secure confessions, therefore, far from being an accidental aspect of police 'investigations' was one of its integral features, constituting the very hub of much police 'work'. This feature of police life explains why, in place of intelligence, the main criterion which potential police recruits needed to fulfil to gain entrance to the force was their ability to defend themselves physically and extract confessions, by whatever means necessary, from detainees. Hence, extra-judicial violence by the police was not the work of a few 'bad eggs' or monarchists out to discredit the force in the eyes of the citizenry

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<sup>23</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 30 April 1935

but, the ineluctable outcome of the pressures facing the force in its day-to-day activities. It was quite evident that neither the Catalan nor the Spanish police were trained to investigate crimes and that members of both forces were simply recruited, uniformed and armed, and in all but the most specialised branches of the police, such as the political police, 'training' did extend beyond general arms and self-defence tuition.<sup>24</sup>

## 6.2. Militarised Anarchism

Unrelenting persecution from the Generalitat police saw ERC-CNT relations reach their lowest point in 1934. The Dencàs-Badia duo prompted comparisons with the Anido-Arlegui dyad, who spearheaded the anti-CNT repression during the dark years of 1920s, a period which remained the bloody yardstick for all anti-worker repression in Barcelona. Solidaridad Obrera maintained that 'the militants of the Confederation and the anarchists enjoy no rights' in autonomous Catalonia as the Esquerra had placed itself 'unconditionally on the side of the bourgeoisie', creating 'The Republic of Guardias' and 'The Republic of Jailed Workers'.<sup>25</sup> The closure of all conventional channels of CNT syndical *praxis*, matched with the lower level of official harassment directed at rival tendencies within the Catalan labour movement, exacerbated the substitution of mass struggle for group terror by the *faistas* and heightened the militarisation and the ghettoisation of the anarchist movement.<sup>26</sup> Thus, following the consummation of the *faista* dream of *trabazón*, 1934 was the peak year of *grupista* activity during the Republic as the anarchist squads became the veritable standard-bearers of the Confederation.<sup>27</sup>

While the 'revolutionary gymnastics' had shown that the Confederal Defence Committees were no match for the armed forces in a frontal clash, in 1934 the *grupistas*

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<sup>24</sup> L'Opinió, 22 September 1934; La Vanguardia, 27 September 1934. The Spanish and Catalan police were not unique by the standards of the day and in North America, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the most advanced police force in the world, only began training its recruits in criminal investigation procedures in 1935: Julian Symons, Crime and Detection, London, 1968, pp.140-141.

<sup>25</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 6, 18, 22 July, 4, 15, 18, 26 August, 6 September 1934; Adelante, 30 January 1934; Abad de Santillán, Memorias, p.229

<sup>26</sup> This pattern was first seen at the turn of the century. See Antonio Robles Egea, 'Terrorismo y crisis de la organización obrera a fines del XX', Estudios de Historia Social, 22-23, 1982, pp.205-238

<sup>27</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 7 July, 3, 8, 18 August 1934

proved that they could function effectively as urban guerrillas. Indeed, it was clear that the armed groups linked to the CNT-FAI had overcome their initial deficiencies that had been painfully obvious in their early battles in the late summer of 1931. The organisation of the *grupistas* was largely entrusted to Victoriano 'Braulio' Prieto Robles, the doyen of the defence squads, who organised paramilitary training, ranging from arms instruction and target practice, across to grenade throwing, in the isolated foot hills on the outskirts of Barcelona.<sup>28</sup>

Although the *grupos* were active across Barcelona province, the regional distribution of their actions reveals that their major operational centres were the ghettos of the Catalan capital, particularly Clot, Horta, Sant Martí and Sant Andreu in the North of the city, l'Hospitalet and Sants in the South and the scattered groups of *Cases Barates*. Outside Barcelona, meanwhile, the *grupistas* were especially active in Terrassa and Granollers, the two provincial areas that had experienced the most dramatic urban development in the 1920s. In these areas, the Confederal Defence Committees possessed sufficiently well developed supply and communication lines to assume guerrilla functions. Despite their numerical disadvantages, the *grupistas* did not flinch from launching audacious attacks, even if they involved engaging the police in gun-battles. Though not perhaps fish swimming in a large sea of supporters, they could at least rely on the tacit acceptance of the inhabitants of the ghettos, whose aversion to the security forces was well proven.<sup>29</sup> Thus, with the exception of the Barri xino, the pattern emerged whereby the police were ever-confident in the bourgeois centre of Barcelona, while in the proletarian suburbs the *grupistas* moved with relative ease. The battle between the *grupistas* and the police therefore reflected the geographical divisions inherent to the metropolitan development of Barcelona and its environs.

However, it was the repressive political context, far more than anything else, that had militarised the CNT-FAI and led it to increasingly rest on the armed *grupos*.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Braulio' was buried in an unmarked grave in Les Planes after he died during an accident while testing a new type of hand grenade developed by the FAI: Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, pp.216-217, 246

<sup>29</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 31 October, 1 November 1934; *Adelante*, 17 February 1934; *Las Noticias*, 12 May 1934

According to Rafael Vidiella, a Barcelona *cenetista*-turned-socialist, this dependency on 'strong-arm men' had already led to the conflation of traditional direct action with 'individual terror' in the years after World War One. The legacy of this period, embodied most vividly in the 'Nosotros' *grupo*, was a simplistic, militaristic mentality that tended to locate complex political problems in terms of armed violence and relations of force.<sup>30</sup> To be sure, there was an extensive cult of weaponry among the Barcelona anarchists that cannot be explained exclusively in terms of self-defence, and it was *de rigueur* to carry small arms, particularly the fashionable 'Star' pistol. Meanwhile, leading *faístas* like García Oliver kept veritable arsenals, including bomb-making gear, in their flats.<sup>31</sup>

The martyrdom of the *grupistas* enhanced the myths of individual resistance surrounding the FAI. Moreover, the individual audacity of the *grupistas* conveniently obscured the disastrous ramifications of *trabazón* within the CNT. Having embroiled the unions in the 'revolutionary gymnastics' and the attendant repression, the FAI looked on *grupista* violence as a substitute for mass action. In the absence of collective pressure from CNT unions, the FAI rediscovered its Bakuninist roots, employing violence as armed propaganda and a surrogate for mass struggle. Accordingly, the mass union was replaced by the small group as the protagonist in the social struggle and the Confederal Defence Committees maintained a significant level of violence throughout 1934 and 1935.

In the tram sector, where 400 *cenetistas* had been victimised after their strike became enmeshed with the December 1933 putsch, the *grupistas* launched a campaign of bomb attacks on plant and attempted assassinations against managers in a bid to secure the re-admission of the sacked workers. In other sectors, *grupistas* also endeavoured to fill the vacuum left by the retreat from mass syndical pressure. Unable to rely on collective union power, armed squads toured workshops warning employers that they would be 'dead men' if they did not take on workers from the CNT *bolsa de trabajo*. Meanwhile, managers who victimised *cenetistas* received written threats. Joseph

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<sup>30</sup> Rafael Vidiella, 'Causas del desarrollo, apogeo y decadencia de la CNT', *Leviatán*, February 1935, p.32

<sup>31</sup> *FAI*, 8 January 1935; *La Vanguardia*, 1, 25 March 1934; *La Publicitat*, 19 April 1934; García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p.209

Mitchell, the Scottish manager of the *L'Escocesa* textile factory, received a stamped note from 'The Arm-Twisters' ('La mano que aprieta'), warning that earlier death threats and bomb attacks on the personnel and plant of the factory were mere 'lessons'. Replete with promises of violence, the note outlined a 'scorched earth' policy if sacked *cenetistas* were not re-employed within 15 days, promising that 'we will be very cruel, for it means nothing to us if the factory closes, because then the entire show will end up in the street'. The note concluded with a pledge to Mitchell that 'the vengeance will be terrible and there will be days of mourning in your home and in *L'Escocesa*', along with a threat to send the manager on 'a one-way trip of the sort from which there is no possible return'. In similar 'substitutionist' fashion, *grupistas* protested at conditions facing detainees by shooting the director of the Model jail.<sup>32</sup>

The vanguard militarism of the *grupistas* was a poor alternative to the collective struggles that gripped Barcelona in 1931. Nor was small group violence enough to offset the waning strength of the CNT. In fact, the climate of collective despondency that had first entered the CNT also seeped into the ranks of the *grupistas*. The underlying isolation of the *faistas* was exemplified by the *grupo* that admitted planning the assassinations of several employers in the belief that symbolic acts of aggression against the enemies of the proletariat would serve as the 'spark' to arouse working class youth from its 'cowardice'.<sup>33</sup>

Yet individual and small group terrorism failed to ignite anything other than a burning repression that heightened syndical demoralisation. The counter-productive nature of *grupista* violence was patently obvious in the reduced number of union struggles in the dark years of anti-CNT repression between 1934 and 1935. For instance, in Terrassa, *grupistas* greeted the outbreak of a strike by textile workers by assassinating an employer, thereby providing the authorities with a convenient pretext for an offensive against the union that culminated in the collapse of the strike. Meanwhile, defeat merely

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<sup>32</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 11, 16 January, 22 February, 13 September 1934; *L'Opinió*, 19 January 1934. In July 1936 this threat was carried out, when Mitchell's car was machine-gunned from a passing taxi: *Las Noticias*, 3-4, 10-11 July 1936; FO371/20522/W5989/62/41, FO371/20522/W6059/62/41 and FO371/20522/W5990/62/41: Letters from C.G. Vaughan, 26 June and 2 July 1936 (PRO)

<sup>33</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 24-27 November 1934, 23 July 1935; *Las Noticias*, 11 December 1935, 2 February 1936

provided a new rationale for the sterile violence of the *grupistas*, who responded by bombing the home of one employer and assassinating another. The *grupistas* also displayed a scathing contempt for rank-and-file union democracy. An example of this followed a dispute between workers and management at a Barcelona textile plant management. Although the workers passed a collective union resolution that expressly rejected all acts of 'individual terror', this did not prevent the *grupistas* from intervening in the dispute and the employer was shot dead by a young *faista*.<sup>34</sup>

Devoid of any strategic vision, *grupista* terror brought woeful consequences for the entire proletariat by providing employers with either the grounds or the justification for closing workplaces and sacking scores of workers. The assassination of a number of employers in the recession-hit textile sector served as a pretext for the Unión Industrial Algodonera, a powerful consortium that ran a chain of textile factories, to close a series of factories in Catalonia, leaving around 5,000 workers without jobs. Meanwhile, suggesting that economic dislocation was, in fact, the desired end of the FAI, *cenetistas* on a 'go-slow' in Poble de Lillet were thrown onto the street after their factory was bombed.<sup>35</sup>

As the CNT unions remained drained of their past power, the *grupos* became increasingly sensitive to criticism from all quarters, not just 'class enemies' but, also the growing number of anti-libertarian voices from within the labour movement. Moreover, the élitist and militarist ethos of the *grupos*, clearly an extension of the theoretical precepts behind 'revolutionary gymnastics', validated the physical elimination of the opponents of anarchism from inside the organised labour movement. Hence, those *ugetistas* who had been assassinated by *grupistas* for 'scabbing' during strikes in 1933, became part of a wider inquisitorial, anti-proletarian campaign that saw a series of attacks on *bloquista*, *treintista* and *ugetista* 'scum' (*canalla*) in the bid to 'persuade' workers to affiliate to the CNT not out of choice, but for 'health reasons'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Adelante*, 9-11, 21 February 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 22 February, 4-5 December 1934

<sup>35</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 28 April, 4, 9-17 August, 31 October, 1 November, 26 December 1934, 27 June 1935; *Las Noticias*, 16-17 January 1936; *Adelante*, 8 March 1934

<sup>36</sup> *Las Noticias*, 26-27 May 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1-5, 23-24 September, 1, 5, 10 October, 4 November 1933, 5 August 1934; *Sindicalismo*, 14 July, 1, 4, 25 August, 15 September, 27 October, 3

### 6.3. Funding the CNT-FAI

The militarisation of anarchism was accentuated further by the financial context of the CNT-FAI. Since the birth of the Republic the CNT and the FAI had become progressively mendicant. Rising state repression and union closures after 1932 severely disrupted normal fund-raising activities, leaving the Barcelona unions in a particularly parlous state, owing growing amounts of union dues to the Catalan Regional Committee. Amid a worsening financial context, the advent of 'revolutionary gymnastics' placed new demands on the depleted resources of the unions. The situation deteriorated even more at the beginning of 1934, because the Generalitat clamp down on clandestine union collections meant that the Barcelona Local Federation was running on a weekly deficit of 40,000 pesetas. The Baix Llobregat CNT reported its 'distressing condition' and many other unions reported the 'deplorable situation' of their internal resources. Apart from inviting state repression on the CNT, the FAI also bore much responsibility for the impecunity of the unions because its inquisitorial purge of the Confederation had led to the loss of around 80,000 members in the Barcelona area between 1931 and 1934. Moreover, the unions who left the CNT were largely based on the more stable sectors of the workforce, like the *treintista*-inclined Sabadell Local Federation, the wealthiest unions in Catalonia. At the same time, the bulk of the pro-anarchist unions that remained more often than not had larger numbers of the unskilled and unemployed, reduced numbers of dues-paying members and lower levels of internal organisation.<sup>37</sup>

Over the same period, there were new pressures on the CNT press. Not only did the loss of trade union membership presuppose a cut in the readership of Solidaridad Obrera but, the pursuit of *trabazón* and the conversion of the CNT daily into an exclusively anarchist newspaper meant that sales had fallen considerably. Subsequently, larger amounts of union funds were required to subsidise the press. Matters were

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November 1933; El Transporte, 18 June 1934; Cataluña Obrera, 26 May 1933; Comercio y Navegación, March-November 1933; Catalunya Roja, 19 October 1933; Tierra y Libertad, 2 June 1933; El Luchador, 31 March, 9, 16, 23 June, 28 July 1933; La Batalla, 31 August, 7, 14, 21 September, 19 October 1933; Adelante, 17-20 October, 1-2, 7, 19 November 1933; Mall, 4 November 1933

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 7, 29 November, 28 December 1931 (AHN); Solidaridad Obrera, 9 December 1931, 18 March 1932, 29 January, 20 September 1933; La Publicitat, 5, 8, 11 April 1934; CNTrabajo, Memoria...de 1931, pp.11ff; CRT, Memoria...de 1933, pp.5-9

compounded further by the repression. From the beginning of the 'cycle of insurrections' in 1932 Solidaridad Obrera was weakened by a series of bans and fines imposed by the censor. In what was ultimately an unsuccessful bid to overcome its weekly deficit, the CNT daily was forced to accept advertising. According to one of the Solidaridad Obrera editorial team, by 1934 the most important CNT daily in Spain was financially 'broke', on the verge of being 'killed' by the censor. The FAI press was in a similarly dire financial strait. Tierra y Libertad operated on a regular deficit, while long-standing plans for an anarchist daily could not be fulfilled. Meanwhile, more esoteric publications like Iniciales, an anarchist monthly aimed at 'individualists, nudists and vegetarians', also suffered from on-going budgetary problems.<sup>38</sup>

The most serious effects of the economic crisis of Confederal organisations were felt by the Prisoners' Support Committees. In 1931 the Catalan CNT had agreed to direct 5% of all weekly union dues to the Prisoners' Support Committees to maintain the 'victims of the social war' and their families. While, from the beginning it was rare for all the unions to honour this donation, following the downturn in CNT resources, the funding of the Prisoners' Support Committees became even more erratic. Meanwhile, in the wake of rising social conflict and the total rupture in relations between the CNT and the Republic, there was a vertiginous growth in the numbers of activists who were jailed, blacklisted or 'on the run' (*perseguidos*) and, consequently, dependent on the Prisoners' Support Committees.

This combination of factors meant that the quota agreed in 1931 could not keep pace with the demands of the Prisoners' Support Committees. For instance, by the spring of 1932, a good week of benefits and collections that brought in over 2,000 pesetas for the coffers of the Prisoners' Support Committees was still nearly three times below its weekly expenditure in Barcelona. Because the CNT rested on principles of active solidarity, this was clearly an unacceptable state of affairs that seriously jeopardised the

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<sup>38</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 9 December 1931, 5, 17 January, 9 March 1932, 15 January, 24 June, 10 August, 7 October 1933, 13 July 1934; Minutes of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 28 December 1931 (AHN); CRT, Informe que el director de 'Soli', Liberto Callejas, presenta al pleno de Sindicatos de Cataluña, que se celebrará en Terrassa los días 24 y siguientes de diciembre de 1932, Barcelona, n.d., *passim.*; CRT, Memoria...de marzo de 1933, *passim.*; Peirats, Figuras, p.44; La Publicitat, 8 April 1934; Tierra y Libertad, 17, 24 October 1931; Iniciales, January-June 1935



guiding ethos of the organisation, however, despite calls from the Prisoners' Support Committees for a 'fraternal hand' from the unions, the financial rot continued to spread. In September 1933 the International Refugees Support Committee, which in the two years since its formation in July 1931 had aided over 200 foreign anarchists to flee repression, admitted it was in a 'desperate state' due to a 'lack of economic resources' and testified to the 'unwonted frequency' with which it was 'embarrassed' when comrades came in need of assistance or legal defence. The Prisoners' Support Committees also confessed that it was often left struggling to scrape the money together for welfare support and court expenses. Matters became so bad that the Marseilles Prisoners' Support Committee, a pivotal body within the prisoners support network that assisted *perseguidos* smuggled from Barcelona by friendly dockers, announced it could no longer offer financial support to militants. Inside Barcelona the growing financial burden on the Prisoners' Support Committees was becoming unbearable for the prisoners and their families who made known their irritation at the irregularity of welfare payments. Finally, *cenetista* and *faïsta* detainees issued a motion of condemnation to the Local Federation, attacking the 'inefficiency' of the Prisoners' Support Committees and the 'lack of attention' it paid to those who had 'fallen in the struggle against capitalism and the state'.<sup>39</sup>

The CNT-FAI leadership needed no reminder that the plight of the prisoners was a highly emotive factor. In 1931 the fate of the prisoners had been a time-bomb ticking away under the *treintista* leadership, as the detainees in Barcelona emerged as vociferous adversaries of the moderate anarcho-sindicalists. It was clear, therefore, that any failure to keep the Prisoners' Support Committees afloat and subsidise the relatives of the detainees carried the danger of denting the credibility of the anarchists at the head of the CNT. However, hopes that the unions could bail out the Prisoners' Support Committees were unrealistic. Considering the dangerous paralysis and financial dislocation facing the

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<sup>39</sup> Minutes of the Plenums of the Barcelona CNT Local Federation, 7, 29 November 1931 (AHN); La Publicitat, 5, 11 April 1934; Solidaridad Obrera, 11 December 1931, 18, 24 March, 29 May 1932, 17, 19 September 1933; Tierra y Libertad, 19 November 1935

CNT, the FAI Peninsular Committee issued an appeal to the Confederal Defence Committees and its own *grupos* for money.<sup>40</sup>

The Confederal Defence Committees responded by initiating its own 'extraordinary' means of financing the institutions and press of the Confederation, embarking on a strategy of armed 'expropriations'. As one Catalan activist later explained, 'one well prepared attack and you get away with a some of money equal to four weeks collections...To raid a bank was an episode of the social war'. Therefore, just as the Confederal Defence Committees were called upon to fill the vacuum left by the decline in CNT syndical muscle, so too were the *grupos* now required to guarantee the internal funding of the Confederation. The legendary 'Braulio', the chief of the Confederal Defence Committees, assumed responsibility for the financial well-being of the movement. The Barcelona prisoners had already intimated that such a course of action this solution would be a suitable response to the problems facing the Prisoners' Support Committees and they proposed the formation of special 'committees' to collect what they obliquely described as 'extraordinary contributions'. These 'expropriations' also formed part of a campaign to 'save the daily' from the aggressive state censor, providing Solidaridad Obrera with what one its contributors discretely described as 'loans'.<sup>41</sup>

The recourse of the anarchists to 'expropriations' cannot be explained simply in economic terms, however. All revolutionary and left-wing groups faced immense economic restrictions on their activities. It was the FAI ascendancy that guaranteed the switch to illegal fund-raising tactics in the CNT and the advent of a policy which, in the words of Durruti, was 'to seize the money wherever it may be'. The origins of the tactic lay with the 'economic attacks' perpetrated by Francisco Ascaso, Durruti and García Oliver in the early 1920s to fund the activities of the Catalan anarchist movement. This was followed by the fantastic bohemian voyage of Francisco Ascaso, Durruti and Jover across Latin America, during which they paid their way with the proceeds of a string of bank robberies, as well as financing local syndicalist groups. On their return to Europe

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<sup>40</sup> José Luis Gutiérrez Molina, La Idea revolucionaria. El anarquismo organizado en Andalucía y Cádiz durante los años treinta, Madrid, 1993, p.73

<sup>41</sup> Porcel, La revuelta, pp.118-121; Abad de Santillán, Memorias, p.234; Solidaridad Obrera, 19 September 1933; La Publicitat, 8 April 1934; Peirats, Figuras, p.44

the funds were used to publish Faure's Nouvelle Encyclopédie Anarchiste and form the Librairie Internationale in Paris.<sup>42</sup>

By contrast, the anarcho-syndicalists, like the dissident communists, were vehemently opposed to the illegality advocated by the anarchists. Although the *bloquistas* accepted collective revolutionary violence and organised 'proletarian shopping-trips', the mass shoplifting raids of the unemployed, they rejected armed robbery as an unacceptable practice. The *treintistas* shared this attitude and while they saw popular illegality in terms of social conditions, they condemned any involvement by labour militants. This was clear from the period when the *treintistas* controlled Solidaridad Obrera in 1931, when they kept an embarrassed silence whenever illegal acts were committed by either anarchists or union members. The *treintistas* saw crime as the 'preserve' of the bourgeoisie or 'convicts and brothel-goers' and they had a moralistic attitude that was sometimes expressed in a conservative legal vernacular, in many ways similar to that of the right. For example, during a discussion with the Mayor of Barcelona soon after the birth of the Republic a group of anarcho-syndicalists described Durruti as a 'common criminal'.<sup>43</sup>

The FAI had none of these reservations when it came to illegality. Their new fund-raising method was first glimpsed in spring 1932 during a bitter strike in the wood sector, a noted FAI bastion, during which a highly intransigent bourgeoisie faced traditional 'active picketing', as well as sporadic 'expropriation' by *grupistas* who sought to force the employers to pay for their obduracy.<sup>44</sup>

By 1934, armed 'expropriations' were a regular side-show of city life, reflected in attacks on lucrative targets such as pay-rolls, banks or bank messengers that reaped up to 100,000 pesetas. During May alone, a staggering 150,000 pesetas was lifted from pay-rolls, banks, financial offices and lottery agencies, in a series of attacks that revealed

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<sup>42</sup> Paz, Durruti, pp.61-133; Ferrer, Durruti, pp.59-60; Salvador Cánovas Cervantes, Durruti y Ascaso: la CNT y la revolución de julio (historia de la revolución española, Toulouse, 1939, pp.10-12

<sup>43</sup> Las Noticias, 30-31 May 1931; La Batalla, 11 February, 29 December 1932; Pestaña, Lo que aprendí, vol.2, pp.75-79; Solidaridad Obrera, 11 April, 30-31 May 1931; Cultura Libertaria, 6 November 1931, 9 June 1932; Sindicalismo, 30 June 1933; La Colmena Obrera, 30 October 1931; Madrid, Ocho meses, p.172

<sup>44</sup> García Oliver, El eco, p.208; Comercio y Navegación, February-March, June 1933; La Vanguardia, January-March, 15 June, 31 October 1933

a high level of organisation and clinical execution.<sup>45</sup> Another fund-raising method without the risks of the 'expropriations' was the collection of 'revolutionary tax' from the local rich. This was particularly popular with the anarchists of l'Hospitalet who demanded sums of money from businessmen and politicians with threats of bomb and gun attacks for those who refused to pay up.<sup>46</sup>

The Confederal Defence Committees-based 'expropriation' squads were organised in the same way as the union defence groups. Like the Confederal Defence Committees, the 'expropriation' teams concentrated their activities in the city in which they lived. One member of the 'expropriation' team served as liaison with the district Confederal Defence Committees 'quartermaster', who would furnish the necessary assortment of pistols, sub-machine guns and, when necessary, grenades. Although the squads normally relied on speed as their main ally, they were very well armed and on more than one occasion the bourgeois-Republican press lamented that even if the police managed to intercept the 'expropriators' after a raid, they still managed to escape, thanks to their superior weaponry. In a raid on the pay-roll at Batlló Textiles the eight member gang made off with 50,000 pesetas after fighting their way out of a police cordon in the city centre with guns and grenades and seeing off a lorry load of *Asaltos* who cornered them in Santa Coloma. When possible, the 'expropriators' acquired Studebaker and Buick cars, both of which were faster than police models, although normally they relied on taxis that were either hi-jacked in advance or 'hired' from friendly *cenetistas*, like Fernando 'El Chofer' González Salvador, one-time president of the Barcelona taxi drivers' union.<sup>47</sup>

The *modus operandi* of the 'expropriation' teams was very similar to that employed by the *grupistas* for assassinations. Just as enemies were 'targeted' for attack, a member of the *grupo* would complete lengthy intelligence work before an

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<sup>45</sup> See the daily press for 1934, especially *L'Opinió*, 2 January, 30 March 1934; *Las Noticias*, 1-31 May, 4 October 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 27 March, 19 July, 2 August, 5, 9 September 1934; *La Publicitat*, 5, 6, 11-12 April 1934

<sup>46</sup> *La Veu de Catalunya*, 16 May 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 19 May 1933; *Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 20 March 1936 (AHLL)

<sup>47</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 18 September 1932, 25 June 1933, 15 February, 31 March 1934, 2 July 1935; *La Publicitat*, 1, 4-6, 10-12 April 1934, 2 July 1935; *Tierra y Libertad*, 29 August 1931; *Las Noticias* 18 September 1932, 4 September 1934; *Adelante*, 9, 13 January 1934; García Oliver, *El eco*, p. 94

'expropriation', observing the objective from a logistical point of view, noting the level of traffic in the area, the proximity of police stations and the accessibility of escape routes. Once convinced of the viability of the project, the intelligence would then be pooled with other *grupistas*. If the plan was accepted a final briefing would be arranged during which a date for the attack would be set and the *grupistas* would be assigned specific duties. After the attack, assuming all had gone well, the 'expropriators' would meet at a previously arranged place and the money and arms would be collected by a *grupista* delegated to liaise with the Prisoners' Support Committees. Meanwhile, any casualties would be taken to doctors who were supportive of the CNT-FAI. Finally, a previously agreed fee, deliberately set at the wage rate of a skilled manual worker in an attempt to prevent the emergence of privileges among the 'expropriators', was then paid to the *grupistas* for their efforts.<sup>48</sup> This payment was important because militancy in the 'expropriation' teams was very often the preserve of the unemployed who, by dint of their jobless status, had both time on their hands to devote to the *grupos* and the need for financial assistance.

It was striking that even when *grupistas* used grenades and sub-machine guns to effect their escapes, there were rarely civilian casualties during the 'expropriations'. That said, the audacity of the 'expropriators' was matched with a high degree of determination which, in the face of resistance, quickly turned into ruthlessness, as witnessed when a Mataró bank manager was left seriously wounded after attempting to raise the alarm during a hold-up. The security forces, both public and private, were treated with a similar lack of respect and the architects of the 'expropriations' showed little hesitancy in killing either private security guards or policemen. Meanwhile, Gil i Gil, the l'Hospitalet Councillor, was shot dead for failing to meet the 'revolutionary tax' demanded by the self-styled 'Committee for Social Revolutionary Terrorism' ('Comité del terrorismo pro-revolución social').<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *La Publicitat*, 1, 5-6 April 1934

<sup>49</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 19 May 1933, 27 March, 19 July 1934; *Las Noticias*, 4 October 1934; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 16 May 1933

Bound by a shared ideology and common goals, there was a high degree of solidarity and cohesion among the 'expropriators'. The police persistently complained about the Catalan version of *omerta* that led detainees stubbornly to refuse to name their colleagues. It was also common for *grupistas* caught gun-in-hand during raids to stick doggedly to the story that their weapons had been provided by an individual whose identity, like that of their associates, was completely unknown. The police thought otherwise, and regularly attempted to extract the truth from detainees. In a number of cases, however, it is quite likely that this defence was true, for not only was the identity of the 'quartermaster' a well-kept secret known to only one member of the team but, many of the *grupistas* referred to one another by *noms de guerre* or by nicknames (*apodos*). Even a well-informed source like García Oliver admitted that he did not know the true identity of several of his close comrades. The squads were not completely devoid of traitors, however, and the *grupistas* were occasionally forced to treat such perfidy with 'trials' and 'executions'.<sup>50</sup>

It is possible to make a number of generalisations about the members of the 'expropriation' teams. It was extremely rare for women to participate in the *grupos* and their contributions were almost exclusively of an auxiliary nature, not normally involving the use of a pistol. Instead, the profile of the expropriation squads was overwhelmingly young, male and working class. Even the more seasoned activists in the Confederal Defence Committees 'expropriation' teams, like Antonio Palacios, an occasional contributor to both Solidaridad Obrera and Tierra y Libertad and former president of the Barcelona Leather Workers' Union, or Dionisi Eroles Batlle, a *grupista* veteran of the war with the *libres* in the 1920s and one-time bodyguard for Peiró, were still under 40 years of age. Activists from the anarchist youth movement, the FIJL, featured prominently among the 'expropriators' and the arrest of a number of 'young lads' (*xicots joves*) by police led to the dislocation of at least two *grupos*. Josep Martorell i Virgili, one of the most active 'expropriators' from the 1930s and sensationally nicknamed 'Public Enemy Number One' by the Catalan press, was only 20 years old at the time of

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<sup>50</sup> García Oliver, El eco, p.241; La Publicitat, 11 April 1934; La Vanguardia, 15 February, 11 December 1934, 11-12 December 1935; Las Noticias, 4 September 1934

his detention, yet had an array of bank and shop robberies to his name and was responsible for the death of a security guard during a getaway.<sup>51</sup> Besides juvenile enthusiasm, the youth profile of the *grupos* can also be linked to rebellion of young operatives in a city whose industry depended heavily on child labour.

There was a considerable overlap between the 'expropriators' and the Confederal Defence Committees. One of the most prolific 'expropriation' teams of the period, dubbed 'The Martorell Gang' by the bourgeois press, contained among its number members of the Barcelona Prisoners' Support Committees and Confederal Defence Committees activists from Sants and La Torrassa. According to Francisco Ascaso, one of the team, Morales López, 'excelled himself in the struggles against capitalism and the state'. Meanwhile, the exclusively anarchist 'affinity groups' were highly active in armed fund-raising and at different times members of the Mataró-based 'Disciples of Bakunin' and the 'Rebel Eagles', as well as the Barcelona-based 'Hydra', 'Libertarians' and 'Anonymous Action', were detained for armed robbery, as were members of the Ateneu Faros, the main anarchist educational centre in the Catalan capital.<sup>52</sup>

Contrary to the stereotypes developed in the bourgeois-Republican press of the *faista* as a savage beast, many of the arrested 'expropriators' displayed considerable intelligence, something that helps explain how they often managed to avoid detention for long periods of time. The landlady of a *grupista* killed in a shoot-out with security forces told police that her former tenant was 'well spoken', 'very reserved' and possessed 'quite a lot of books...by night he always read, locked away in his room'. Similarly, despite being dubbed 'Public Enemy Number One' and compared to both Al Capone and John Dillinger, unsympathetic bourgeois journalists could not help observing that Martorell was an 'elegantly dressed youth' who 'possessed a level of culture that is anything but

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<sup>51</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 29 April, 6, 23 June, 13 December 1933, 30 January, 1, 15 February, 31 March 1934; *Tierra y Libertad*, 29 August 1931, 14 July 1933; *La Publicitat*, 1-5, 10 April 1934, 8-9 January 1935; José Peiró, *Peiró*, pp.32-33; *Las Noticias*, 16 February 1932; García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.210-211; *La Humanitat*, 5 June 1933; *L'Opinió*, 30 March 1934

<sup>52</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 18 July 1931, 23 January 1932, 24 February, 23 September 1933; *La Publicitat*, 8-9 January 1935; *La Vanguardia*, 25 July 1931, 27 December 1932, 19-20 October, 6 December 1933, 27 December 1934, 3, 8-9, 16, 27 January, 2 February, 10 April, 29 July 1935; *Las Noticias*, 6, 16 February 1932, 4 September 1935; *El Matí*, 14 November 1935; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 6 September 1934, 28 April 1936; *L'Opinió*, 19-20 October 1933

normal'. Another 'expropriator', Joan Piera i Bofill, was described in the press as an 'intellectual'. Meanwhile, journalists from the bourgeois press were equally bemused by the morality and the lifestyle of the 'expropriators' who often had fortunes in his command but yet led a frugal existence, donating the bulk of the bounty from his 'expropriations' to the CNT-FAI.<sup>53</sup>

#### 6.4. Anarchism and Popular Illegality

The headline-stealing armed robberies perpetrated by the Confederal Defence Committees were the most conspicuous examples of a far wider pattern of illegality in the 1930s. The bulk of this illegality was a continuation of the proletarian self-help strategies that had become commonplace since the advent of recession and consisted of attacks on petit bourgeois and commercial targets like those discussed earlier on wine stores, bakeries, shops and bars. Highway robbers also remained very active on the isolated country roads around Barcelona. In Terrassa there were even reports of masked armed men holding up bourgeois pedestrians in the city centre. While the majority of these attacks would not have brought lucrative rewards, the perpetrators were determined to maintain their freedom and, when challenged, they showed little compunction in using their guns. Meanwhile, a spate of armed robberies against rent and debt collectors was accompanied by considerable brutality by the perpetrators, a fact that cannot be dissociated from the unpopularity of their targets.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout 1934 it became increasingly evident that the militants and unemployed activists of the CNT were playing a growing role in this illegality. A gang detained during an attempted train robbery included two anarchist brothers from l'Hospitalet, both of whom were activists in the local CNT Unemployed Committee. It transpired that another gang of three highway robbers arrested on the Carretera d'Esplugues, who were believed responsible for a wave of highway robberies in the area,

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<sup>53</sup> La Vanguardia, 12 December 1933, 23 February 1934, 8-9, 27 January, 10 April 1935; La Publicitat, 10 April 1934, 8-9 January 1935

<sup>54</sup> See the press for 1933 and 1934, especially Comercio y Navegación, February-March, June 1933; Las Noticias, 2, 4 February, 1, 6, 8, 10, 13 May 1934; La Vanguardia, 31 October 1933, 24 February, 10 March, 30 June, 2 September 1934; L'Opinió, 10 March, 21 June 1934; La Publicitat, 11 April 1934; La Veu de Catalunya, 8 April 1934



was comprised of unemployed *cenetistas* from La Torrassa. There was also evidence of an overlap between some of the unemployed activists who had earlier been detained for 'forced eating' and this armed illegality.<sup>55</sup>

Popular illegality was encouraged by the anarchist conceptions of both unemployment and crime that validated individual acts of criminality by the jobless, ranging from armed robbery, across to shop-lifting, 'wholesale shopping' (*comprar a la mayor*) according to Solidaridad Obrera, the requisition of crops from the land and even the counterfeiting of money. One of the sporadic manifestos of the CNT Unemployed Committee addressed 'To the jobless workers in Barcelona' counselled that 'it is necessary that all unemployed workers take radical measures'. Meanwhile, Solidaridad Obrera explained that 'if the partner (*compañera*) of a proletarian is dying of hunger and the children ask for bread with tears in their eyes and their father is deprived of the right to earn it with the sweat of his brow, one way or another it must be procured'. Hunger, what Tierra y Libertad described as the 'fundamental crime of capitalism', was a problem that the unemployed had to remedy itself, not by 'begging' the authorities to introduce welfare benefits, but by 'the rebel gesture' of illegality. These 'gestures' had enormous propaganda value for the anarchists, who celebrated shoplifting raids by the unemployed as 'the only way to make Capital and the State recognise that there is hunger and that it was necessary to do something about it'. They saw this illegal self-activity as infinitely preferable to the other possibilities facing the unemployed and rather than accepting 'denigrating' Catholic charity, Solidaridad Obrera reflected that 'it would be more noble if instead of asking, they [i.e. the unemployed] demanded or seized what they needed'. This orthodoxy sometimes led anarchists to adopt a highly disdainful attitude towards those unemployed who did beg. One evening Durruti brought stunned silence to the 'La Tranquilidad' bar when he responded to the plea of a beggar by reaching inside his jacket pocket and filling the hand of the appellant with a huge pistol, offering the advice: 'Take it! Get to a bank if you want money!'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> La Vanguardia, 27 September 1933, 9 September 1934; L'Opinió, 21 June 1934

<sup>56</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 10 August, 7 December 1932, 1 January, 4, 16 April 1933, 20 February, 15 September 1935; Joan Llarch, La muerte de Durruti, Barcelona, 1985, pp.44-45

The anarchists continued to reject any attempt to initiate collective struggle similar to the CDE. Accordingly, the struggle of the BOC to forge proletarian unity within its 'Workers' Alliance Against Unemployment' ('Aliança Obrera contra el Atur Forçós') was disdainfully rejected by the anarchists as a 'communist plot'. The anarchists juxtaposed the collective organisation of the unemployed with individual or small group activity aimed at what the Catalan FAI termed the 'wearing down of the capitalist system'. In the view of 'Marianet', a leading Builders' Union activist, certain types of behaviour described in conservative social discourse as 'robbery' were both 'anarchist and revolutionary'. According to their own particular interpretation of direct action as violence, the anarchists celebrated the illegality of the jobless as a positive sign that the dispossessed were prepared to take charge of their own destinies, an indicator of the fighting spirit of the masses and a necessary part of proletarian survival.<sup>57</sup>

The illegality of the jobless was, therefore, anything but 'criminal' in the eyes of the libertarians. Instead, it was the honourable pursuit of 'the right to life', 'the most sacred right of all', which was systematically contravened by capitalism. Crime, therefore, was one of the 'derivatives of hunger', the 'logical consequence of the economic system', practised by 'unfortunates pursued by hunger, who rob because hunger is killing them' and who were 'more worthy of compassion and help than punishment'. During another discussion of illegality Solidaridad Obrera noted that 'not only do we understand but, we also excuse, because responsibility falls on the egoistic and brutal society that oppresses us'. The authorities naturally viewed matters differently and jobless detainees who justified illegality to 'procure the means of existence' and defended their entitlement to 'conquer' the 'right to life' received heavy prison terms from outraged Judges.<sup>58</sup>

For the libertarians, the individual illegalist 'gesture' became a latter-day version of the 'propaganda of the deed'. The anarchists sought to direct the unemployed as a 'shock force' on the streets to dislocate bourgeois social peace and demonstrate that a

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<sup>57</sup> Gómez Casas, Anarchist organisation, p.143; Solidaridad Obrera, 26 April 1934; El Luchador, 7 July 1933

<sup>58</sup> Tierra y Libertad, 24 June 1932; Solidaridad Obrera, 22 March, 9 November 1932, 18, 25 March 1933, 1 March 1935; La Vanguardia, 11 August 1933

truly harmonious civic order was inconsistent with capitalism. One group of unemployed anarchists failed to impress their trial judge when they invoked Bakunin to justify their robbery as 'a blow' (*un golpe*) by which they hoped to arouse the servile spirit of the unemployed. This illegality sometimes acquired highly theatrical features, as exemplified in the raid of an armed gang on a cinema box office during which one of the 'expropriators' took time to explain to bystanders that he and his colleagues were not 'robbers' but unemployed workers, 'tired of living with hunger'.<sup>59</sup>

In another sense the expansion of illegality in the 1930s was in no small part the outcome of the vicissitudes of the class struggle and the long-standing punitive practice of employers blacklisting labour militants. The Republic had not altered the retributive 'covenant of hunger' imposed on labour activists. Indeed, the concentration of employers' organisations in the 1920s and early 1930s meant that blacklists were circulated more widely than in the past and it was more difficult for activists to dodge them by moving elsewhere in the country. Blacklisting was also encouraged by the Generalitat, which replaced victimised *cenetistas* with workers from its own *borsa de treball*.<sup>60</sup>

Because the increasingly weakened unions of the CNT lacked the strength to place activists in work, many of the hundreds of blacklisted militants in Barcelona turned to armed robbery. José Escolano López, a 'solitary robber' sentenced to a 42 year sentence for holding up car drivers around the bourgeois suburbs on the outskirts of Barcelona, was a *faísta* and a well-known anarchist since before World War One. Other anarchist veterans, all of whom undoubtedly figured in employer blacklists at one time or another, set out to resolve their short-term insolvency through illegal means and figured prominently among the highway and bank robbers of the 1930s. The same was also true of many of the anarchists who returned from exile in 1931 in a jobless and penniless state. The press covered numerous Catalans with 'advanced ideas' who arrived in Barcelona with French comrades and proceeded to 'expropriate' together. Most notably, these included Martí Serrarols Tresseres, who was wanted for the assassination of a Tarragona judge and had spent the 1920s eluding the authorities in Spain, Italy, France

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<sup>59</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 20 August 1931; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 24 December 1933

<sup>60</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9 October 1932, 20 September 1933; *Sembrar*, 19 November 1932

and South America, before returning to the Catalan capital, where he was arrested for armed robbery. There was also a clear overlap between the 'expropriators' and the veterans of the 'action groups' who had stood up to the *Libres* during the daily street battles of the 1920s. One such activist was Àngel Latorre Morales, a veteran *grupista*, who was sentenced to 35 years for a bank raid in Manresa in which he killed a security guard. Similarly, Leon Escudero, wanted for the 1918 assassination of the Mayor of Reus, was eventually apprehended by the police while foraging the country roads on the outskirts of Barcelona for wealthy car drivers.<sup>61</sup>

Activists blacklisted during the watershed conflicts of the Republican years also ranked among the 'expropriators'. These included militants those sacked after the 1931 Telefónica strike, the September 1931 general strike, the 1932 woodworker's stoppage, the 1933 builders' conflict and the 1933 tram strike. Moreover, as well as rank-and-filers, leading *cenetistas* from the Republican era practised popular illegality, including the ex-president of the Barcelona Wood Workers' union and Francisco Tomás Facundo, also known as Francisco Hearto, the one-time President of the CNT in l'Hospitalet.<sup>62</sup>

The connection between *cenetistas* and *faistas* victimised and blacklisted after the 'revolutionary gymnastics' and the 'expropriators' was equally intimate. The case histories of those victimised after the putsches provide examples of some of the most committed and desperate examples of the 'expropriators'. These *perseguidos*, who were correctly regarded by the police as the most dangerous, were readier than most to use their arms against the security forces and on more than one occasion these 'fugitives from bourgeois repression' shot and killed police to guarantee their freedom. The attitude of these *perseguidos* was embodied by the words of Piera, himself blacklisted after the January 1933 rising: 'given that society declared war on me, I declared war on

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<sup>61</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 1 December 1920, 29 May, 8 August 1923, 20 August 1931, 17 March, 19 July, 25 October, 8 November 1932, 24 January, 15 March, 23, 31 May, 2, 20 June, 2 August, 15 December 1933, 22 November, 7 December 1934, 4 June 1935; *Las Noticias*, 1 February, 11 April, 8 May, 4 June, 3, 19, 26, 28 November, 1 December 1931, 19 January, 16 February, 17 August 1932, 4 September 1934; *La Noche*, 2 November 1931; *La Publicitat*, 31 May 1933; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 21 April 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9 August 1923; *El Matí*, 4 June 1931

<sup>62</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 23 July, 6 September 1931, 24 January, 19 February, 31 March, 2 April, 14, 31 May, 18 July, 8, 11 August, 24 October 1933, 19, 25 July, 5 August, 26 September, 4 December 1934, 16 March, 15, 31 May, 22 August 1935; *La Publicitat*, 31 May 1933; *Las Noticias*, 26-27 September 1934

society'.<sup>63</sup> Joaquín Aubí Casals also stands out amongst the *perseguidos*. A member of the FAI *grupos* from before the Republic, Aubí Casals was suspected of assassinating a Libre gunman in Badalona before being arrested with a smoking gun in the Plaça de la República on the bloody May Day of 1931. Escaping custody in the jailbreak that accompanied with the December 1933 putsch, Aubí Casals went on the run, participating in the 'revolutionary gymnastics' and afterwards excelling as an 'expropriator' in the so-called 'Martorell Gang'. It is, in fact, highly likely that he had long participated in armed robbery because, according to García Oliver, it was Aubí Casals and his friends who financed the 1931 FAI May Day rally with money from a 'lottery win'. Finally, in 1935 Aubí Casals was sentenced for the murder of a Mataró bank manager and for his part in another robbery at the Banco de Bilbao in Barcelona.<sup>64</sup>

The relation between blacklisted activists and armed robbery should not be viewed in an overtly instrumental light, because the victimised militants did have some, even though limited, choices. For example, in the 1920s Camil Pinyón, an anarchist metal worker and later *treintista* worked as a barrow-boy after he was refused employment in every workshop in the Catalan capital. Equally, in the 1930s Peirats, a blacklisted anarchist brickmaker and a rising figure in the l'Hospitalet FAI, was able to live from his newly developed journalistic talents. However, in fairness, the journalistic talents of Peirats were not possessed by all blacklisted militants. Moreover, in the recession-torn 1930s a number of the escape-routes into casualised pockets of the job market that had traditionally been open to victimised activists were closed off.<sup>65</sup>

Illegality was also, at times, a necessary outlet for refugees from fascism. In an increasingly repressive Europe, many anarchists converged on Catalonia in an attempt to

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<sup>63</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 26 October 1932, 7, 11 January, 31 March, 2 April, 23, 31 May, 27 July, 2 August, 15 October 1933, 14 February, 3 April, 6 June, 22 November 1934, 5 March, 10 April, 26 October, 25 December 1935; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 5 January, 31 May 1933, 8, 12 April 1934; *La Publicitat*, 10, 12 April 1934; *Tierra y Libertad*, 3 February 1933; *L'Opinió*, 8 October 1933; *Las Noticias*, 14 April, 8-9 May 1934, 24 January 1935; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14-18 August 1934

<sup>64</sup> *Las Noticias*, 31 May, 15 November 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 November 1931, 8 February, 12 March 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 1 June 1932, 25 July 1934, 31 May 1935; García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.115-116; *Tierra y Libertad*, 7 July 1933

<sup>65</sup> Léon-Ignaci, *Los años*, p.219; Vega i Massana, *El Trentisme*, p.118, n.22; Various, 'José Peirats Valls: Historia contemporánea del Movimiento Libertario. Visión crítica de un compromiso anarquista: la Revolución Social', *Anthropos*, 102, 1989, pp.15-16; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 19 September 1933

escape repression at home, in the hope that their Iberian comrades could provide solidarity. Soon after the birth of the Republic Italian anarchists, many of whom had outstayed their welcome in the neighbouring French Republic, began to arrive in Barcelona. The ranks of the exiles were swollen after the coup d'état of General Uriburu in Argentina in 1930, when a number of Spanish émigré anarchists and native Argentinians made their way to the Catalan capital. Following the advent of General Salazar's dictatorship two years later many other anarchists came from neighbouring Portugal. By 1935 official estimates pointed to just under 16,000 'illegal' immigrants in Barcelona, the majority of which were 'political', fleeing fascist or authoritarian régimes.<sup>66</sup>

While the International Refugees Support Committee offered assistance for displaced anarchists, organising collections for the anti-fascists, settling them in the city and offering legal advice, there were few opportunities of finding work. Moreover, the tasks of the International Refugees Support Committee were hampered by the Republican authorities who, like their French neighbours, were far from hospitable towards the proletarian anti-fascist exiles. Highlighting the selective policy of the Republic towards the enemies of Mussolini, the Republic welcomed middle class, liberal and intellectual opponents of Mussolini, who were offered asylum. Meanwhile, despite official utterances of anti-fascist solidarity, proletarian Italian émigrés were subjected to intense police harassment, and even expelled from the Spanish state. Even when anti-fascist workers found stable employment it was very difficult for them to acquire work permits and there were cases of émigrés who had work still being hounded out of the country as 'illegal immigrants' and 'dangerous anarchists'. Consequently, living under the constant threat of deportation, and like many of the unemployed, excluded from the

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<sup>66</sup> According to the police, there were 5,500 Germans, 1,500 Italians, 600 Argentinians, 430 Cubans, 330 Austrians, 300 Hungarians and 130 Portuguese. *Tierra y Libertad*, 19 November 1935; Santillan, *Memorias*, p.188; *La Publicitat*, 2 January 1935; Anello Poma, 'Antifascisti Piemontesi e Valdostani nella Guerra di Spagna', *Supplemento al Quaderno del Centro Studi Piero Gobetti*, 12, 1975, pp.6-31

official economy, the anarchist anti-fascists were pushed towards a life of illegality in Barcelona and took up arms to satisfy their daily living expenses.<sup>67</sup>

The émigrés, like the blacklisted *cenetistas*, were often inclined towards illegality due to political judgement and individual disposition. For instance, Germinal de Sousa, an unemployed Portuguese *faísta* refugee never took recourse to armed illegality in Barcelona. Similarly, there is no proof that leading émigrés from the Argentinian FORA such as Manuel Villar and Abad de Santillán ever committed acts of illegality, despite arriving penniless to face a harsh life of exile in Barcelona. On the testimony of Abad de Santillán, 'Villar would have starved to death before trying his hand at such activities'.<sup>68</sup> Equally, there is no evidence that any of the communist refugees in Barcelona were detained for acts of armed illegality.<sup>69</sup>

Matters were very different for the bulk of the anarchist refugees, however, the majority of whom could not follow the example of Villar and Abad de Santillán and wield the pen to live. Moreover, it is evident that many undoubtedly found the pistol mightier and easier to manipulate. Hence, within the ranks of both the foreign and the indigenous anarchists a kind of natural selection operated whereby young unemployed worker-intellectuals used their time to write, while others, of a more adventurous temperament, the so-called 'men of action', practised armed illegality. This was recognised by Abad de Santillán, who admitted that some of the unemployed Argentinians, including a number of his intimate friends, adopted 'direct action, the daring attack (*golpe de mano*)' and 'were inclined to look for their survival with means that the law punished heavily'.<sup>70</sup>

Of all the foreign anarchist 'expropriators' it was the Italians who revealed most aplomb. One of the most prominent Italian anarchist 'expropriators' was Pietro Bruzzi, a Milanese anarchist and veteran of Italian libertarian struggles from the turn of the

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<sup>67</sup> *Las Noticias*, 7 March, 17 May, 5 June, 29 November 1931, 4 May 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 8, 17 September 1931, 5 July, 13-15 December 1932, 7 May, 8, 11 August, 27 September, 15 October 1933, 4 December 1934; *La Nau*, 24 April 1931; *L'Opinió*, 26 October 1933

<sup>68</sup> Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, pp.182, 185

<sup>69</sup> While it is still possible that foreign communists did commit expropriations but managed to evade the police, it is most likely that the communists eschewed acts which they regarded as 'individual terror'.

<sup>70</sup> Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, pp.182, 220-221

century. Forced to flee fascist repression in the early 1920s, Bruzzi was expelled from Belgium and France, where he had headed the Paris-based Committee for Political Victims. Before his expulsion from Paris in 1928, Bruzzi entered into contact with Spanish and Catalan émigrés, forging ties that eventually led him to Barcelona. The illegality of the groups of Italian émigrés was characterised by such verve that they attracted many Catalan and Spanish anarchists. For example, from 1932 until his arrest in 1934, Giuseppe Vicari carried out a series of small armed raids on shops and chemists, both to fund the anarchist movement and for the subsistence of the members of the so-called 'Vicari Gang', which included the Sabater brothers from l'Hospitalet. Similarly, the anarchist *grupo* that the bourgeois press dubbed the 'Alpini Gang', which was reputedly led by Rimini-born Alpini, included Gabriel Jover Planes, a veteran *grupista* from the 1920s, as well as members from the Ateneu Faros. Another Ateneu Faros member who 'expropriated' with Italian émigrés was Josep Gardenyes. A leading Barcelona *faïsta*, Prisoners' Support Committees activist and one of the main organisers of the International Refugees Support Committee, the friendship between Gardenyes and the Italian anarchists preceded Mussolini's accession to power, when the Catalan lived and worked in Italy.<sup>71</sup>

The illegality that was often a necessity for the libertarian émigrés and the blacklisted *cenetista* militants and the unemployed was a glorious virtue for the anarchist-individualists in Barcelona. These individualists drew on the strands within anarchism that had long glorified the robber. This trend dates back to Bakunin, the doyen of European anarchism, who described the bandit as 'the genuine and sole revolutionary - a revolutionary without fine phrases, without learned rhetoric, irreconcilable, indefatigable and indomitable, a popular and social revolutionary, non-political and independent of any estate'.<sup>72</sup> Certainly, in one sense it is true that as the

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<sup>71</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 6 January, 18, 24 March, 7, 4 April, 31 May, 18 July 1933, 27 December 1934, 4, 28 January 1935; *Revista Anarchica*, *Red Years, Black Years. Anarchist Resistance to Fascism in Italy*, London, 1989, pp.7, 37-38, 43; *Tierra y Libertad*, 19 September 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 September 1934; *Las Noticias*, 17 May, 5 June 1931, 4 October 1934, 5 February, 16 May, 4 July 1936; Antonio Téllez Solá, *Sabaté. Guerrilla urbana en España (1945-1960)*, Barcelona, 1992, p.42; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 6 January 1933, 18, 21 April 1934; García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p.230

<sup>72</sup> Cited in Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, Harmondsworth, 1985, p.110



harbingers of a new socio-juridico-economic order, all revolutionaries are, *ipso facto*, outside the laws of bourgeois society. Some anarchists, however, took this truism as evidence that all those outside the law were revolutionary or, at least, nascent rebels.

The typically anarchic conflation of illegality per se with revolution was given a new impetus by the individualist anarchism of Max Stirner.<sup>73</sup> Reasoning from the idealist premise that the law was endowed with no other punitive power than that which the consciousness of the meek endowed it, the Stirnerists regarded individual (criminal) will as the grave-digger of the state. From this premise the Stirnerists lauded crime in the same way a poet might worship beauty, viewing illegality as a liberating journey of self-actualisation. Rather than place faith in the transforming powers of the proletariat, they looked towards the 'dispossessed' and 'the race of the poor', an amalgam of paupers, criminals and *déclassé* intellectuals, as the *locum tenens* of change. Meanwhile, the Stirnerists rejected all morality based on collectivism, including that of revolutionaries, as a debilitating gaol for the individual spirit. Similarly, they rejected all organisation, from the CNT unions right across to anarchist organisations like the FAI, on the grounds that these 'dominating and regulatory' bodies that turned individuals into 'machines'. Instead, extrapolating the individualistic ethos of capitalism and elevating it to the level of ideology, they conceived of a pseudo-Darwinian quest for survival in which beggars were to starve, while those with a spirit of resistance would be forced to conquer what they needed or desired, invoking their sacred right to violence. The only collective units the Stirnerists accepted as legitimate were the 'unions of egoists', the tiny groups of 'authentic revolutionaries' which they regarded as the harbinger of change.<sup>74</sup>

Though Stirnerist individualism had never been one of the dominant strands of the Catalan anarchist movement, by the 1930s the standing of the individualists within the Iberian anarchist movement had increased considerably. Firstly, many of the anarchists exiled in Paris in the 1920s had been exposed to the individualist current in the

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<sup>73</sup> For Stirner's philosophy see R.W.K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, Oxford, 1971, John P. Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism*, London, 1976 and Enrico Ferri, *L'antigiuridismo di Max Stirner*, Milan, 1992. For a study of Stirnerism in practice see Richard Parry, *The Bonnot Gang. The Story of the French Illegalists*, London, 1987.

<sup>74</sup> *Iniciales*, August 1929, December 1930, May 1932, November 1934, January-May, December 1935-February 1936

bars and cafés of Montmartre, where the legend of Bonnot was still very much alive. Acción, the Spanish publication of the Parisian Revue Internationale Anarchiste, revealed the influence of French theorists and validated individual struggle. Secondly, Sebastian Faure, the spiritual guide to Durruti, strongly favoured individualism and the practical messages of the individualist credo appealed enormously to the poverty-line bohemia of the Iberian exiles. Thirdly, Stirnerist ethics were already evident in the cardinal tenets of Iberian anarchism. In the view of Pestaña, the belief that universal human emancipation would arrive through the sacrifice of the lone avenger allowed Stirnerism to draw on old Spanish anarchist traditions of the 'myth of individual terror'.<sup>75</sup>

While the aversion of the individualists to collective organisation inhibited them from expressing themselves directly through either the CNT or the FAI, a number of historical, political and personal ties connected the individualists to those who constituted the CNT-FAI leadership after 1932. Many of the anti-syndicalists within the FAI created a highly favourable climate for the individualists. For example, Antonio 'Dionisios' García Birlan, a leading individualist of the period, was an associate of the Urales clan, all of whom were bound together by their pronounced anti-syndicalism. Other individualists like Alfonso Miguel, Gardenyes and the Ballano brothers, Ceferino and Adolfo, had emerged from Barcelona's *grupos de afinidad* in the 1920s, along with many of the activists who led the CNT in the 1930s. Adolfo Ballano had been a member of 'Los Solidarios', alongside Durruti, Francisco Ascaso and García Oliver, while Miguel, another erstwhile member of 'Los Solidarios', established himself as Durruti's favourite driver. The contacts between the individualists and the *faísta* leadership of the CNT were also in evidence after the birth of the Republic. This was most notably the case with Gardenyes, who emerged as a leading *faísta* in the Catalan capital in 1931. Gardenyes was held in particular esteem by García Oliver and he regularly appeared at meetings on the same platform as 'The Three Musketeers'. García Oliver was also a close associate of Piera, another prominent 1930's individualist.<sup>76</sup> Durruti, meanwhile, was an important

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<sup>75</sup> Acción, August 1925; Pestaña, Lo que aprendí, vol.2, pp.63-64

<sup>76</sup> La Vanguardia, 10-11 August 1923, 25 June, 31 October 1933, 15 February, 31 March, 15 April, 19, 25 July 1934; Las Noticias, 4 September 1934; Solidaridad Obrera, 24 August 1923, 28 June 1931, 6 September 1934, 4 July, 20 September 1935, 25 April 1936; García Oliver, El eco, pp.115-116; Paz,

point of contact between the CNT-FAI leaders and the individualist-illegalists. The Ruano Segúndez brothers, two Argentinian individualists who arrived in Barcelona in the early 1930s, benefited from the loyal friendship of Durruti. Of the Ruano Segúndez brothers, the individualist credentials of Lucio were second to none: he was an old comrade-in-arms of Severino Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó, two Italo-Argentinian individualists who attained public notoriety and mythical status among the anarchist groups.<sup>77</sup>

These connections made it possible for Stirnerist perspectives on illegality and criminality to attain considerable influence among *faístas* and, to a lesser, but still significant extent, within the ranks of the *cenetistas*. Individualist ideas enjoyed much currency in the libertarian press and La Revista Blanca showed a renewed interest in the ideas of Stirner. It was Tierra y Libertad, however, which most keenly embraced the individualist conception of illegality, glorifying the 'bravery' of the bandits who robbed the lords on the highways of pre-industrial Catalonia. Resounding with the message of Stirner, the FAI weekly argued that because property was a 'symbol of authority', theft, therefore, constituted a subversive act of rebellion. In similar tones, Tierra y Libertad mused that 'robbery does not exist as a "crime"...it is one of the complements of life'. It was even maintained that theft played a pivotal role in the class struggle.<sup>78</sup>

The growing acceptance of individualistic illegality was increasingly seen in the mainstream CNT press. The first shift in the stance of Solidaridad Obrera towards illegality came with the switch in editorship from the anarcho-syndicalists to the radical anarchists late in 1931. This trend became even more discernible after April 1932, during the second period of editorship by Felipe Alaíz, who was a long-standing friend of 'Dionisios' García, the individualist sage. As well as showing a nostalgia for the Andalusian bandits of old, Alaíz counselled readers to 'assert their right to freedom and

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Durruti, p.67; León-Ignacio, Los años, pp.242, 314; Tierra y Libertad, 4 July 1931; La Batalla, 7 July 1932; La Publicitat, 10 April 1934, 4 July 1935; Porcel, La revuelta, pp.126-129

<sup>77</sup> Durruti looked out for the Ruanos largely out of gratitude to their father who had hidden him from the Argentinian police: Llarch, La muerte, p.23; Paz, Durruti, p.314. For Di Giovanni, see Osvaldo Bayer, Anarchism and Violence. Severino di Giovanni in Argentina, 1923-1931, London, 1986.

<sup>78</sup> García Oliver, El eco, p.188; La Revista Blanca, 15 March, 15 May 1925, 30 September 1926, 12 October, 30 November 1934; Tierra y Libertad, 26 April, 8 May 1931, 9 June 1933; FAI, 8 January 1935

to life, [by] seizing "illegally" the wealth that the official robbers store up under the protection of the state'. The quasi-Stirnerian stance of Solidaridad Obrera was ever apparent and the CNT daily praised the anarchists as 'rebels against all laws' generated by 'the vengeful procedures of bourgeois justice' designed to protect the 'enemy society'. In the autumn of 1932, under the editorship of Liberto Callejas, Solidaridad Obrera acquired an even more pronounced individualistic tone, a conversion underlined by one editorial that was a quasi-Stirnerist celebration of 'desire' (*querer*) as the 'order of life'. Meanwhile, on another occasion Solidaridad Obrera welcomed those branded as 'delinquents' by 'those who control' as 'our brothers'. By 1933 these sentiments had germinated into regular 'justifications' of 'violent acts of an individual nature' in the pages of the CNT daily. Finally, between December 1933 and 1935, under the editorship of the Argentinian Villar, Solidaridad Obrera crowned its descent into illegalism with an unambiguous justification of counterfeiting, explaining that there was 'little difference between men who make false money and those who accumulate good money', because 'good money is always a little false', whether attained with 'tricks or favours', while at least 'false money' requires 'competent people with the highest technical skills'.<sup>79</sup>

The 'conscious illegalism' inspired by the individualists was an important factor in the spread of armed criminality during the Republican years. This was periodically reaffirmed by the fervour with which individualists detained for armed illegality shared their Stirnerist notions with the police. For example, when one gang of individualists was apprehended one of their number proudly informed police: 'I'm a pure anarchist and I rob banks, yet I'm incapable of robbing the poor, like others do'. In similar vein, one of his associates admitted freely that 'I go into banks to withdraw with the pistol, while others go in with the cheque book. It's all a question of procedure'. This same 'procedure' was employed by the Ballano brothers, both of whom regularly contributed to the Stirnerist journal Iniciales and 'expropriated' together. Individualism also provided a compelling logic for many other anarchists in Barcelona and several associates of 'Nosotros', the 'super-FAI', were convicted of armed robbery in the 1930s, including Durruti's younger

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<sup>79</sup> García Oliver, El eco, p.188; Solidaridad Obrera, 23 June, 26 August, 16 September, 13 October 1932, 12 January, 11 February 1933, 15 April 1934, 15 September 1935

brother, Bonifacio. Individualist ethics also provided further justification for the armed illegality of the cosmopolitan refugees. There is evidence that French individualists were attracted to Barcelona, including Alphonse Gelabert, an anarchist deserter from the French army who was arrested for highway robbery and described by police as 'a very dangerous individual'. Among the Argentinians Lucio Ruano Segúndez stands out: described by *L'Opinió* as 'one of the most dangerous' anarchists in Catalonia and wanted by police for a bomb attack on the offices of one of Barcelona's employers' associations and for assassinating two police informants who infiltrated the FAI, he lived as an individualist 'expropriator' while on the run from police.<sup>80</sup>

The emphasis of the individualists on the liberating quality of illegality also attracted some of the 'expropriators' who had learnt their skills in the Confederal Defence Committees fund-raising teams. Piera, a former travelling salesman for a Catalan biscuit company, was emblematic of the trajectory of these activists. Arrested by police in the company of García Oliver before the January 1933 putsch, Piera was savagely beaten and tortured by police at the Comissaria on Vía Laietana. The failure of the January 1933 putsch was a watershed for Piera's involvement in collective working class organisation. While his spirit of rebellion was far from snuffed out by the police, the young anarchist and Confederal Defence Committee militant left the FAI in the wake of its defeat and, finding himself victimised, unemployed and blacklisted, became an ardent individualist. Reflecting on his recent past, Piera believed it was 'simple-minded' (*babau*) to remain in an organisation like the FAI and he rejected the 'blind faith' and passive mentality that he felt pervaded it. Indeed, these very sentiments had already led Piera to dispute the division of the spoils of a Confederal Defence Committee robbery because, as he later explained, 'I wanted the bread (*calers*) for myself, whatever the cost'. Police investigations revealed that after leaving the FAI, Piera and his individualist associates operated on the country roads on the outskirts of Barcelona, before moving on to bigger

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<sup>80</sup> *Las Noticias*, 11 April, 3 November, 21 December 1931, 17 August 1932, 21 April 1934, 2 July 1936; *La Vanguardia*, 16 December 1932, 13 August, 27 September, 19-20 October 1933, 31 March, 3 April 1934, 13 January 1935; *Iniciales*, December 1935-February 1936; *La Publicitat*, 11 April 1934; *L'Opinió*, 8, 19-20 October 1933; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 21 April 1934; Llarch, *La muerte*, pp.23-24; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3 December 1935, 7 February 1936

targets, including banks in the Catalan capital. At 20 years of age, Piera was typical of those who were forced into a life on the margins of society by bourgeois blacklists; in the view of Josep Maria Planes, the legal correspondent from La Publicitat, he embodied the 'idealist and human motives that push someone to become a robber...a lad, ready for anything to make money to sustain a life of leisure'. Piera and his associates were lost, at least temporarily, to both the worlds of work and collective organisation and they robbed to live.<sup>81</sup>

A few months after the arrest of Piera, police successfully detained another gang of illegalists that was based on *ex-grupistas* from the Confederal Defence Committees. Two of the detainees had records for armed robbery, while another pair were former 'quartermasters' for the Confederal Defence Committee squads. One of the gang, María Ferrer, was also a relative of Piera and an individualist who, according to Las Noticias, 'confessed to be an anarchist and enthusiastically defended the ideology before the police agents', whom she attempted to persuade of the moral correctness of anarchism.<sup>82</sup>

The unconditional acceptance by the illegalists of all those condemned by bourgeois justice and conservative morality meant that the individualists served as a powerful rallying-point for all advocates of 'criminal' activities, including elements that were conventionally described as 'underworld'. It is not difficult to see how the stance of the individualists appealed to 'underworld' elements, particularly as Stirner himself had regarded 'knaves' and 'villains' as the creators of a new order. The individualist message also consolidated many pre-existing 'underworld' traditions, making it both understandable and highly attractive to recidivists. Added to this was the general openness of anarchists towards all marginal elements and the blind libertarian faith in their capacity to civilise those cast aside by bourgeois society as 'criminals'. One leader in Solidaridad Obrera spoke of the desirability of such an alliance between "'delinquency" and the subversive spirit'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 31 January 1933; La Publicitat, 6, 10 April 1934; L'Opinió, 31 March 1934

<sup>82</sup> Las Noticias, 4 September 1934

<sup>83</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 20 April 1932, 15 April 1934

In subjective, sub-cultural terms, the libertarian conception of illegality had much in common with the culture of the so-called 'underworld'. The anarchists eschewed the use of terms like 'robbery' (*atracó*) and 'steal', speaking instead of the 'transferral' (*traslado*) or 'redistribution' (*reparto*) of money. The culture of the 'underworld' revealed a similar aversion to conventional conservative discourse and just as the anarchist 'expropriators' had their own linguistic code to describe illegality, many offenders adopted a vernacular that legitimised their activities. For instance, the argot used by the Catalan 'underworld' to obfuscate their dealings from informants and police agents possessed no less than five equivalents to the negative-sounding 'lladre' ('thief'), all of which carried positive connotations. Like the anarchist 'expropriators', offenders rarely regarded themselves as 'robbers' (*atracadors*) or 'thieves' (*lladres*) favouring instead terms like as 'unfortunates' (*desgraciats*) or, more favourably still, as 'men of the life' (*homes de la vida*).<sup>84</sup>

The widespread use of nicknames (*apodos*) was another facet shared by both the anarchist underground and the criminal 'underworld'. A highly practical way of concealing true identities from the security forces, it was common for many offenders to be known exclusively by their nickname in exactly the same way as some of the *grupistas* were known by *noms de guerre*.<sup>85</sup> These nicknames often referred to the birthplace of an individual, such as 'El Gallego' ('The Galician') or 'El Mallorquí' ('The Mallorcan'), while in the cases of 'El Cubano' ('The Cuban') or 'El Argentino' ('The Argentinian') they were derived from places where an individual had spent a time of exile. Other nicknames alluded to physical or personal attributes, including 'El Nan' ('Shorty'), 'El Microbi' ('The Sprog'), 'Patilles' ('Sideburns'), 'El Pichi' ('The Spiv') and 'El Cabezota' ('Big-head'). Some, such as Ramon Vila Capdevila, known to his friends as 'Caraquemada' ('Scarface'), were known by their physical deformities. It was also common for nicknames to be epithets to past or occasional occupations, invariably unskilled, such as 'El Paleta' ('The Bricklayer'), 'El Nan del Fabril' ('Shorty of the textile

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<sup>84</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 April 1932; Rafael Vidiella, *Los de ayer*, Barcelona, 1938, p.107; Vallmitjana, *Criminalitat*, pp.6-7, 26, 61

<sup>85</sup> Vallmitjana, *Criminalitat*, p.8

sector'), 'El Portuari' ('The Docker') and 'El Fuster' ('The Woodworker'). 'El Chofer' ('The Driver'), the one-time organiser of the l'Hospitalet CNT Taxi-drivers' union, earned his nickname due to both his former profession and his new-found role in the 'expropriation' squads. The nicknames also revealed a far from enlightened replication of the masculinity that pervaded the 'underworld' and one anarchist, presumably homosexual, was referred to in highly disparaging terms as 'El Chaperó' ('The Queer').<sup>86</sup>

In the 1930s there was an unmistakable overlap between the anarchists and the 'underworld'. Along with the joint struggles of 'common' and 'social' prisoners in the jails, there were a number of signs that an 'alliance' between the two was in the throes of fruition. For instance, the December 1933 jail break from Barcelona prison included *faístas*, 'expropriators' from the Confederal Defence Committee and 'common' prisoners. This confluence was often seen in action during illegality. Antonio Gozalzo Jaque, 'an individual of most advanced ideas', according to *La Noche*, robbed with Georges Albert Dufroy, who, the police alleged, was a French 'pimp'. Similarly, Blas Zambulio, a pivotal figure in the 'expropriations' of the l'Hospitalet Confederal Defence Committee, was previously known to the authorities as a 'common criminal' with no 'political' motivation, wanted for the murder of a newsagent. Also in l'Hospitalet, José David Salgado Prieto, an 18 year old with a 'record for robbery', perpetrated armed robberies with FAI militants. Meanwhile, Alberto Martín Ursal, a Madrid 'con man' detained in Barcelona for burglary, moved in circles that allowed him an 'awareness of all the groups currently dedicated to the commission of attacks and robberies' in the Catalan capital.<sup>87</sup>

The growing confluence between the anarchist underground and the illegalist 'underworld' was especially conspicuous between 1934-1935. This was the time of the strongest repression of the Republican era, when the CNT-FAI structures in Barcelona were disrupted to such a degree that jobless, blacklisted and unwaged militants were largely left to their own devices. Pushed into clandestinity, anarchists maintained contact

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<sup>86</sup> García Oliver, *El eco*, p.45. The examples of nicknames are taken from the daily press throughout the period 1931-1936.

<sup>87</sup> *La Noche*, 2, 6 November 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 17 March, 8 November, 30 December 1932, 23 May, 2 August, 15 December 1933, 21 November 1934; *Treball*, 18 August 1936; *Las Noticias*, 14-20 January 1931, 19 January 1932; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 6 April 1934; *La Publicitat*, 22 January 1932, 6, 10, 12 April 1934; *L'Opinió*, 23 March 1934



primarily within the libertine environment provided by the bars of downtown Barcelona, especially those in the port area of the city, the Barri Xino and El Paral·lel. This setting became the theatre for the meeting of the libertarian underground and the deviant 'underworld', where blacklisted and unemployed anarchists, freed from the discipline of factory life and unencumbered by the normal sleeping and working hours inherent to wage labour, mixed with recidivists. The reports of police *ràtzies* on some of the bars of the city, including 'La Tranquilidad', Durruti's favourite café on El Paral·lel, testifies to the shared environment of the anarchists and the outlaws of Barcelona. One such report, revealed how a series of raids on bars frequented by FIJL militants in the Barri xino led to the arrest of 'a mixture of anarchists and robbers', some 20 'individuals of irregular life, the majority of them young and already filed as anarchists', one of whom was wanted for an assassination attempt on a tram boss. Indicative of the unstable, bohemian lot of the youths, nine of them gave their place of residence as the same Barri xino pensión. Moreover, adding further grist to the mill of the bourgeois press, leads from this raid led police to sweep a number of other bars in the Sants district, one of which was frequented by anarchist youths and petty offenders and yielded over 300 gold watches and a quantity of stolen radios.<sup>88</sup>

## 6.5. Crime Waves and Moral Panics

In 1934 employers' and shopkeepers' associations continued the pressure they had put on the authorities since the birth of the Republic. There were vociferous pleas for the Generalitat to confront the 'crime-wave' which the economic élites viewed as an enormous subversive criminal plot that was on the brink of destroying the institutions of society. Delegations from the commercial classes inundated the authorities with demands to attack the 'underworld', a protest that was interspersed with strikes of shopkeepers who closed their stores to business as a sign of their disgust at ongoing 'public insecurity'. This growing self-activity of the middle-class was spearheaded by groups like the 'Commission of Civic Action Against Robbery and Theft' ('Comisión de AfirMACión

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<sup>88</sup> *L'Opinió*, 23 March 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 8, 11-12 August 1933, 1 February, 7 April, 27 December 1934; *La Publicitat*, 12 April 1934, 8-9 January 1935

Ciudadana contra los Atracos y Robos'), a conservative law-and-order pressure group which advocated arming the petit bourgeoisie. The big bourgeoisie also adopted a campaign of extra-parliamentary pressure and the funerals of employers assassinated by the *grupistas* were converted into protests against the inability of the authorities to curb 'criminal terrorism'. Capitalists also began exporting capital and organising lock-outs of workers and 'civic protests' in favour of 'social concord and public order'. Following a wave of sackings in July, in August 1934 the Federación de Fabricantes de Tejidos y Hilados, the main organisation of the Catalan textile barons, organised a one-day lock-out in Barcelona in protest at the assassinations of its members and issued a press release calling for 'exceptionally energetic measures' to introduce 'perfect social discipline'. Meanwhile, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional impugned what it saw as 'rampant criminality' and called for a mailed fist against the lawlessness that had taken grip of the city. The Catalan bourgeoisie described its 'constant uncertainty' and disillusionment with the Republic, a régime that it believed was increasingly synonymous with an absence of authority. For the Fomento, who regarded illegality as the Achilles Heel of the Republic, 1934 was a year of 'levity in penal legislation; levity in judicial action; lamentable political concomitants with crime...licentious delinquency...frequent announcements of revolutions or, disturbances (*asonadas*), robberies, murder for social motives, endemic strikes...[more] strikes, acts of sabotage, robberies; nothing was absent from the cohort which accompanied the violent outrages'. Finally, the Fomento blamed crime for the economic crisis and, like the 'Commission of Civic Action Against Robbery and Theft', called for an end to the 'unarmed authority' of the Republic and the re-imposition of the death penalty to serve as an example to criminals.<sup>89</sup>

The bourgeois press played a similar tune and joined the chorus against 'scandalous robberies', lamenting that 'public security continues to be little more than a

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<sup>89</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 31 January, 14-16, 25-26 March 1933, 20, 22 February, 18 July, 5, 7 August 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 July 1934; Fomento de Trabajo Nacional, *Memoria...1934*, pp.7-8, 212, 219, 222. The views of the British Consul-General in Barcelona approximated very closely to those of the local bourgeoisie. See FO371/17427/W14776/116/41: Report from Consul-General King, 12/12/33 (PRO): 'There is little doubt that if the leaders of these anarchists could be apprehended and shot, and youthful delinquents imprisoned and flogged, there would be an end to these outbreaks, but, unfortunately, the government here cannot act with sufficient firmness. With the abolition of the death penalty, the enemies of the established order have little to fear'.

hope'. Meanwhile, the relative approximation of the Barcelona anarchists to the criminal fraternity was good copy for bourgeois journalists who advanced pseudo-Lombrosian claims of the osmosis between the libertarians and the so-called 'underworld'. As the robberies, tram attacks and acts of sabotage ceased to abate, La Vanguardia lumped all 'disorder' together in a page headed 'Disturbances of the peace', thereby creating the impression that the dominant sound of the street was a raucous cacophony of destruction and chaos. La Veu de Catalunya demanded an increase in police activity to ensure the victory of the 'law-abiding citizenry' over the 'professional evildoers' in 'the eternal battle between organised society and common criminality'. Harking back to its preferred image of a mythical golden crime-free era, the Lliga, along with the landowners of the Institut Agrícola Català de Sant Isidre and other conservative Catalan social forces, alleged that the Generalitat reforms of the security forces had been ineffectual. As well as mourning the demise of the old monarchical police, the Catalan right persistently argued in favour of the central Spanish authorities resuming control of public order to end the reigning state of 'anarchy', while, in the Catalan parliament, the Lliga exploited the robberies to call for new draconian measures and 'strong government'.<sup>90</sup>

Because the Generalitat had publicly committed itself to ending illegality and win over elements from the bourgeoisie, the Catalan authorities were wounded by the vitriolic campaign of its detractors. Moreover, the Generalitat could not sit back and allow the right to make political advances through the 'respectable fears' over illegality, particularly as small shopkeepers, one of the major targets of armed robberies, remained an important political constituency for the Republican parties. Increasingly, therefore, the Generalitat was captivated by the law-and-order genie that had been released by the bourgeoisie and committed itself to taking over the law-and-order mantle of the Lliga by ending 'endemic criminality' and hitting out against 'wicked people'. During an address at the funeral of a textile employer assassinated by the FAI, Dencàs sought to assuage the fears of the haute bourgeoisie by promising to accelerate the war against illegality and 'to apply the principle of authority'. Meanwhile, adorning themselves with the clothing of

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<sup>90</sup> La Vanguardia, 2, 28 January, 10, 27-28 March, 29 April, 7 September 1934; La Veu de Catalunya, 11 April 1934; Foc, 5 January 1933

the right, L'Opinió, Justicia Social, La Humanitat and La Publicitat vied with the ultra-conservative La Vanguardia and La Veu de Catalunya to censure the 'plague' of 'scandalous crimes' of 'unpunished robbers' and 'bandits'. Of all the Barcelona press, L'Opinió emerged as the most forthright advocate of expanding the 'repressive factor', warning that 'all efforts are necessary' to combat the 'criminal organisation established in our city' that represents a 'problem of life or death'.<sup>91</sup>

Ironically, in a year that saw the creation of the fascist Falange Española and a sharp rise in the danger of anti-Republican reaction, L'Opinió was adamant that crime remained 'the most pressing problem and the most difficult to resolve of all those facing the Republic today'. Paradoxically, the campaign of the *Catalanistes* to snuff out illegality in the 'bulwark of the Republic' increasingly generated its own authoritarian dynamics. While the *Escamots* organised drills in fascist formation, L'Opinió advocated a fierce repression under the cover of the highly autocratic formula of an 'armed democracy', according to which the 'urgent necessity' would be a sweeping reorganisation of the police and a rapid response unit to wipe out 'criminal social dregs'. In an attempt to put the 'criminal classes' where they belonged, the 'Lluhíns' advocated the construction of more concentration camps and the increased use of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* against the 'underworld'. Meanwhile, other elements inside the Generalitat endorsed the establishment of a 'Catalan National Front' to protect society from what it saw as the threat posed by the criminality of immigrant workers.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, when a series of robberies culminated in the killing of a policeman, L'Opinió passed a new landmark on its rightward path, declaring that 'the struggle against wrongdoers' required 'inexorable energy against those who transgress the law', 'extraordinary remedies' to 'intimidate the gangsters' and eliminate 'the cancer of banditry'. Among the measures L'Opinió had in mind were a generalised cut in civil liberties and tough measures against 'layabouts' who, it was maintained, were to be

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<sup>91</sup> L'Opinió, 23 July 1933, 28 March, 13 April 1934; Tierra y Libertad, 24 December 1933, 7 July 1934; La Vanguardia, 7 August 1934; Justicia Social, 31 October, 28 November 1931, 11 November 1933; La Humanitat, 8 March, 8 July 1934; La Publicitat, 8 April 1934

<sup>92</sup> L'Opinió, 6 April, 12 July 1933, 21 January, 7, 11, 13, 28-29 March, 3, 7, 13 April, 9 August 1934; Llibertat, 5 March 1933

'locked in a sanatorium or a reformatory and taught to work'. The 'Lluhins' also proposed the suppression of specific clauses in the constitution, including a possible return of the death penalty, in the drive towards the 'complete extinction' of 'criminal groups'.<sup>93</sup>

This was typical of the sensationalist tone of the Republican press coverage of illegality. Throughout 1933 and 1934 all the bourgeois-Republican press in Barcelona reported appearances of a mysterious 'ghost car' (*cotxe-fantasma*) which reputedly spirited 'expropriators' away from empty banks in Barcelona. Lurid sexual imagery was also very prominent in the coverage of crime in both the catholic conservative and the laicist Republican press. The concern with sex aimed to stigmatise lawbreakers, attributing them with a carnal appetite and a sexual prowess that was fuelled by their illegal ways in a manner that moral individuals could never expect to match. When two anarchist individualist 'expropriators' were arrested the press focused less on their illegality than on their personal lives and the 'two half-dressed young women' found by police in their house. Sexual overtones rooted in the repressed fear of the potential power of carnal attraction were similarly evident in press reports on the few women in the 'expropriation' teams. Media caricatures of the women alternated between that of the gangsters' moll who passively satisfied the carnal needs of the gang members following an armed heist and that of the unprincipled temptress who ruthlessly exploited her physical properties to fulfil her criminal urges. These stereotypes were given full vent in the celebrated case of Mercedes Vives Gascón, a *faísta* who participated in a series of pay-roll heists. Known to the bourgeois-Republican press as 'La Rubia' ('Blondie'), Vives Gascón was portrayed as a lascivious but deadly beauty whose physical properties were manipulated to distract unsuspecting security guards and night-watchmen.<sup>94</sup>

Illegality stimulated a recrudescence of the traditional insecurities of Catalan capitalists about the Barri xino in official circles and the bourgeois-Republican press. In the view of La Vanguardia, the Barri xino encapsulated 'the veritable danger of the slums, where the disease and decay of its dark hovels create a climate favourable to the

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<sup>93</sup> L'Opinió, 24, 28 March, 3 April, 9 August 1934

<sup>94</sup> Las Noticias, 17 May 1932; L'Opinió, 19 October 1933; Solidaridad Obrera, 2 November 1933; La Vanguardia, 1 February 1934; La Veu de Catalunya, 8 April 1934; La Publicitat, 6, 8 April 1934, 4 January 1935

most vile germinations', casting forth 'legions of villains and swarms of parasites'. Concerns about the allegedly criminogenic properties of the Barri xino highlighted the way that the Generalitat had taken on board the law-and-order inhibitions of the old monarchist élites. They were also emphatic that the Barri xino was a dangerous crime zone, an 'underworld' lair, populated by the 'perishing classes'. The authorities were alarmed that the labyrinthine streets of the 'catacombs of Barcelona', with its abundance of 'doss' and boarding houses, made it relatively easy to lead an anonymous life beyond the reach of the police. Indicative of these fears, L'Opinió believed that many of the 'expropriators' lived in and around the Barri xino, where they spent the day strolling around Les Rambles or drinking coffee in Plaça Reial and enjoying all the freedoms enjoyed by law-abiding citizens.<sup>95</sup>

The growing obsession of authorities that the Barri xino was Barcelona's main centre for urban degeneration led them to ignore the abysmal housing conditions in the area and resurrect the traditional connection between moral and corporal collapse. Consequently, the urban poor were blamed for the high levels of illness and disease within the 'labyrinth of infected streets' that comprised the Barri xino. The Generalitat also uncritically accepted the anti-modernistic bourgeois fears of the flamenco bars, cafés cantants and clubs in the Barri xino as *foci* of perversion, the breeding ground for crime and the centre of the city's drugs and prostitution trade. Indeed, it was felt that the inspiration for the immorality of the 'expropriators' came from the brutalising spectacles provided by popular night-spots like 'La Criolla' and 'La Muralla' in the Barri xino and in the bawdy theatrical and musical offerings of El Paral·lel. This was combined with a wider denunciation of the cultural, social and leisure patterns of the masses by the Republican authorities that differed little from their monarchist predecessors. This thesis was explained by a physician close to Generalitat circles, who implied that degeneration was linked to the deficient ethics of the inhabitants of the Barri xino and attributed the

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<sup>95</sup> L'Opinió, 26 March, 22 September 1933; La Publicitat, 16 August 1933, 11, 18 April 1934; La Vanguardia, 26 April 1934, 10 November 1935; de Bellmunt, Les Catacumbes, pp.73-82

high levels of illness in the area to 'those who lead a nocturnal life in the cabarets and other places of doubtful morality'.<sup>96</sup>

The Catalan Republicans placed responsibility for what they saw as the depravity of the Barri xino on their favourite scapegoat: the southern Spanish immigrants. With their usual linguistic sleight of hand, *Catalanistes* referred to the area in Spanish as the 'Barrio Chino', inferring that its problems were quintessentially Spanish rather than Catalan. Less subtly, the 'Lluhíns' dubbed the Barri xino 'the Andalusian Barcelona'. Bars in other marginalised areas that the Generalitat regarded as 'criminal haunts', such as the Riera Blanca and Collblanc on the l'Hospitalet-Barcelona border, were also identified with the arrival of non-Catalans. This fitted with the shared view of all the parties in the Generalitat, including the USC, that crime was as alien to the Catalan way of life. Emphasising the connections between immigrants and illegality, *L'Opinió* whined 'they [i.e. the immigrants] contaminate us and inflict their gunmen and other criminals on us'.<sup>97</sup>

This stereotype extended to the anti-fascist refugees in Barcelona who were regarded as 'criminal elements' by both left and right alike. For the Catholic right, these bohemian and immoral non-believers were of 'doubtful moral conduct', the instigators of 'vandalistic acts'. Meanwhile, the well-proven xenophobia of the Republicans seized on the presence of the 'foreign' and 'alien' anti-fascists. In a bizarre acceptance of Mussolini's fascist 'justice', *L'Opinió* was convinced of the badness of one Italian anarchist because he 'had been condemned to death by the Italian courts'. Meanwhile, Frederic Escofet, a highly placed figure within the Generalitat security forces attributed lawbreaking to the anti-fascist exiles, whom he viewed as 'the social detritus expelled from other countries that had the sense not to allow them to return', 'international criminals' from the world over, enticed to Barcelona by its reputation for police incompetence and laxity. In similar tones, *La Publicitat* reported how the Barcelona 'underworld' had been augmented by the émigrés, including 'over 300 Spanish anarchists from Argentina', who looked on the

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<sup>96</sup> *L'Opinió*, 22 September 1933, 9 August 1934; *La Publicitat*, 11 April 1934; Claramunt i Furest, *Problemes*, p.14

<sup>97</sup> *La Publicitat*, 11 April 1934; *Justicia Social*, 28 November 1931; *L'Opinió*, 22 September 1933, 7 April, 9 August 1934

Catalan capital as 'a centre of refuge' made it 'a favourite operational zone for the international criminal world'.<sup>98</sup>

Italian anarchist émigrés were singled out for particular derision. Coverage of the Italians in the bourgeois-Republican dailies was of a highly salacious nature and was often peppered with allusions to their reputed sexual prowess. Stories of Italian anarchists detained on charges of armed robbery were frequently accompanied by references to the 'attractive young women' whose company they allegedly kept, thereby generating an image of playboy gangsters with a lover in every port in the Mediterranean. It was even asserted that when the Italian libertarians were not engaging in illegality, 'the large part of them live from women' and the drugs trade in the Plaça del Teatre, the main centre for prostitutes in 1930s Barcelona.<sup>99</sup>

The bi-partisan panics over the alleged connections between immigration and crime complemented the allegations of the Catholic right that unstable family lives and domestic dislocation were the harbingers of illegality. For instance, the Esquerra excoriated the young 'undocumented' immigrant workers who descended on Catalonia. Similarly, the pious La Veu de Catalunya believed that 'a band of youngsters between 17 and 25 years old' and a 'considerable number' of 'runaway children', the majority of whom were assumed to be non-Catalans, were a 'scourge' attracted by the reputation of the 'dissolute life' (*la mala vida*) in Barcelona. These 'bohemian youth' constituted a 'constantly increasing floating population', swollen by waves of young 'hobos' (*polissons*) who arrived concealed on goods trains. According to La Veu de Catalunya, these homeless youths 'live for the day and by night sleep wherever they can: sometimes in the taverns of the Barri xino, sometimes in the stores around the port or in a sheltered doorway'. It was claimed that 'hundreds' of them slept on the beaches in summer. 'They don't work, nor have they ever thought of doing so', the Lliga daily complained; they were undisciplined individuals who represented a 'formidable danger' to public order and provided the 'best ingredient' for 'professional gunmen and robbers'. It was suggested

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<sup>98</sup> Barangó-Solís, Reportajes, p107; Las Noticias, 7 March, 29 November 1931; El Matí, 6 September 1935; L'Opinió, 19 April 1934; Escofet, De una derrota, pp.162-163; La Publicitat, 11 April 1934

<sup>99</sup> La Vanguardia, 18 April 1934; La Publicitat, 12 April 1934



that once freed of the calming, socialising and moralising influence provided by the family unit and unshackled from filial responsibilities, these youths were 'exploited' by 'the men of vice and crime' until they were 'predisposed towards every kind of monstrosity'.<sup>100</sup>

Fears of wayward youth fostered renewed concerns in the official imagination about the interdependency of the anarchist *grupos* on street gangs. The dismay of conservative and Republican commentators alike was further heightened by the revolutionary bohemia that permeated the Barcelona FIJL, who were widely seen by the authorities as 'licentious', 'uncontrollable', non-conformist individuals, bent on an 'irregular life' in 'immoral establishments'. The socialists employed a similarly conventional rubric of proletarian decency and described the anarchists as *déclassé* 'down-and-outs', 'a minority of adventurers of working class origin'. Joan Comorera, a leading figure from the USC, identified anarchism as the ideology of 'sub-human' and 'degenerate' individuals, 'underworld parasites', 'professional layabouts' and 'crooked people'. Adding to the erosion of the division between criminal behaviour and social protest, the Catalan UGT condemned the CNT for inciting the unemployed towards 'the social goal of robbery, of storming the shops' when the working class had recourse to 'social legislation'.<sup>101</sup>

The tenor of the discourse of the authorities increasingly went against even the legal activities of the labour movement. The growing preoccupation about the condition of youth focused on excursionism, the mass hiking expeditions organised by anarchist and communist walking clubs designed to take workers back to the fresh air of their rural roots. According to the bourgeois-Republican press, once in the countryside, innocent youths were 'forced to listen' to anarchist speeches, amid orgiastic scenes of 'free love'. As well as providing a morally debilitating ambience, it was asserted that the excursionist clubs provided cover for the organisation of criminality and that bank robbers planned their attacks during walks in the countryside, far away from the

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<sup>100</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 August 1934; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 27 April 1934

<sup>101</sup> *La Publicitat*, 18 April 1934; *La Vanguardia*, 26 April 1934; *Justicia Social*, 1 August 1931, 29 April, 22 July, 11 November 1933; *Cataluña Obrera*, 26 May, 9 June 1933

surveillance of the police. Similar reservations were expressed about the educational Ateneus, which, the bourgeois-Republican press feared, were the prime cause of corruption among youth. La Veu de Catalunya saw the union pedagogical centres as *foci* of impropriety, where anarchists proselytised and 'perverted' youth, putting 'very young boys' and 'naïve youngsters' on a path of illegality and depravity.<sup>102</sup>

Increasingly, therefore, the identification of the 'social' with the 'criminal' led the Generalitat to view the CNT-FAI as little more than a criminal network engaged in a destructive offensive against Catalonia that was compared with the Carthaginian sacking of Rome. In an address to the Catalan Parliament, Dencàs demagogically cited a series of pay-roll robberies as proof that the CNT-FAI was made up of 'individuals who talk of constructing a new society by snatching the wages of a humble worker', thereby echoing Azaña's famous allegation that *cenetistas* were 'bandits with union cards'. The anarchists were the 'gangsters of the labour movement', 'a criminal band' and an 'enemy rabble' of 'villains, thieves and bombers', 'born delinquents' and 'professional criminals' who had privately established a 'Robbers' Union' (*Sindicat d'atracadors*) that 'sheltered behind the name of the CNT to commit common crimes and pass them off as social acts'. In the view of L'Opinió, whose cartoon caricatures depicted the robbers as the same Neanderthal figures as the FAI *grupistas*, the only thing that differentiated the anarchists from 'common criminals' in other countries was that in Catalonia they controlled 'a press which defends the validity of robbery and glorifies dead robbers'.<sup>103</sup>

These Lombrosian-type allegations reached their apogee in a series of articles by Josep Planes, the legal correspondent with La Publicitat. Dressing up the moral panics as investigative journalism, Planes interspersed 'respectable fears' about 'criminal anarchism' with pseudo-anthropological digressions about the pre-industrial Italian *brigands* and Andalusian *bandoleros*. Alleging that 'the characters who lead the various robbery gangs are the most prestigious figures from the anarchist movement', Planes concluded that the 'expropriations' were a *sui generis* 'original type of criminality', 'typically *Barcelonin*',

<sup>102</sup> La Publicitat, 12 April 1934; La Veu de Catalunya, 4, 26 April 1934

<sup>103</sup> La Victòria, 28 May, 11 June, 31 December 1932; La Vanguardia, 29 July 1934; Liarte, El camino, p.153; L'Opinió, 26 March, 5 November 1933, 7 March, 19 April, 1 May, 15 August 1934; Justicia Social, 29 April, 22 July, 11 November 1933

'inclined by a disposition towards crime and delinquency, which finds a justification or an explanation for criminal instincts under the flag of anarchism'. The repressive agenda of Planes's study were quite transparent, however, and his obsession with 'the anarchist problem' led him to make a number of unsubstantiated allegations that Italian, Argentinian and German refugees were active in prostitution rackets and the drugs trade in Barcelona. Meanwhile, ignoring the wider ambitions of the libertarian movement, Planes, like Lombroso, regarded anarchism as a fundamentally criminal ideology and claimed that 'the anarchist-robbers or the robber-anarchists of Barcelona are nothing less than the Catalan equivalents of Al Capone...Today it is the fashion among all thieves, pickpockets and swindlers to pass themselves off as anarchists'. Planes also attested that the osmosis between the libertarians and the 'underworld' was so perfect that it was impossible to deduce 'whether anarchism benefits from banditry or banditry benefits from anarchism'.<sup>104</sup>

The study by Planes was bound up with the view of the Generalitat that anarchism was the preserve of the Barcelona 'underclass' or, as the snobbish USC put it, the 'lumpenproletarian' detritus of the city.<sup>105</sup> This traditionally conservative concept of an 'underclass', which included the morally irresponsible elements within the unemployed, was a development of the 'undeserving' or 'dangerous' dichotomy that occupied a central place within the demonology of the Republican authorities after 1931. It was maintained that this 'underclass' was contaminated by the brutalising experiences of long-term unemployment and that the 'bad ways' of these lubricious individuals were incorrigible, as proven by their wretched existence in the hovels of their ghettos and by their craving for sensual pleasure in the immoral dens of the Barri xino.

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<sup>104</sup> La Publicitat, 6, 10-12 April 1934

<sup>105</sup> Justicia Social, 22 July, 7, 14 October, 11 November 1933

## 6.6. The Moral Panics Explored

The sensationalism of the bourgeois-Republican press was in part the outcome of the growth in the number of newspaper titles during the Republic and the enhanced competition as the leading dailies resolved to maximise their market share. This also coincided with a period of real interest in 'organised crime' and the appearance of the first 'crime journals' in Catalonia. These new titles, such as El Detective, focused on the most grotesque and macabre crimes from around the world, including a far from coincidental interest in Chicago gangsterism and the antics of Capone, Dillinger and the legendary 'Ma' Barker-Karpis Gang.<sup>106</sup>

However, the real significance of the exaggerated, often fantastic moral panics, was that they were an integral part of the initiative of the authorities to mobilise the civilian population on the side of the state and gain popular acquiescence for official sanctions against 'evildoers'. In this sense, the talk of a dangerous 'underclass' was an invitation for sections of the proletariat to join the chorus of the respectable classes against the long-term unemployed. The 'underclass', like the 'undeserving' poor, could not just be ignored: their unproductivity made them at best a parasitic burden on the rest of society; at worst they were a dangerous threat to the well-being of 'honest' citizens. Moreover, the theory of a debauched and degenerate 'underclass' produced by its own immoral ways, and not by the imperfections of society, suited middle class Republican opinion which was largely incapable of comprehending the series of circumstances that led from unemployment to poverty or from homelessness to illegality.

In a similar way, tales like the 'ghost car', which pointed to the growing potency of the 'criminal classes', were instrumental in securing popular backing for new police powers in their war against illegality, as well as reiterating the need to strengthen state control over society. The image of the omnipotent 'expropriator' was exploited by the Generalitat to demand respect for the security forces and construct a consensus around an increasingly draconian vision of an autonomous Catalonia. Stories of criminal omniscience were also exploited to alter popular perceptions of the police. Firstly, they

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<sup>106</sup> El Detective, 20, 27 December 1933. The violent death of Dillinger was widely reported in the Catalan press, especially in L'Opinió, 27 July 1934.

both excused police failings in the fight against 'evil-doers'. Secondly, the emphasis on the need to ensure the victory of the forces of order over the forces of darkness legitimated the growing number of intrusions by the authorities. For instance, in the regular L'Opinió section entitled 'The Robbery of the Day', minor non-violent thefts were described sensationally as if the streets were teeming with bloodthirsty villains. Not only did L'Opinió overstate public concerns about illegality, but the violence of the 'expropriators' was also exaggerated to legitimate police aggression. However, suggesting the public concern with illegality was not as great as the authorities hoped, L'Opinió issued periodic calls for more public confidence in the police and implored a 'civic reaction' in the hope that citizens would intervene and detain lawbreakers.<sup>107</sup>

The substance of the panics of the Generalitat was a refraction of reality through the prejudiced prism of bourgeois morality, privilege and power. In this sense, the dread of the Barri xino was based on anti-modernistic fears of the consequences of industrialisation and class struggle. The black legend of the Barri xino propagated by the Generalitat was based on a theory of 'district infection' and the zonal contagiousness of crime, according to which existing 'crime areas' attracted deviant newcomers to the city, leading to the establishment of criminal communities.<sup>108</sup> This view stubbornly ignored the socio-economic context and the reality that rather than the creation of immigrants, the Barri xino was a necessary companion to the capitalist city: it was the oldest industrial zone in the city, it had a symbiotic relationship with the port and the development and crisis of the area was inextricably bound up with the ebb and flow of the local economy; it was, in the view of one group of local historians, a 'permanent testimony' to the Catalan industrialisation process. After World War One and the expansion of new industries around the periphery of the city, the economy of the district went into decay, tipping the balance in favour of the flourishing popular entertainments in the Barri xino. Meanwhile, the cheap pensions, hostels and 'doss-houses', where beds were rented by shifts to itinerant labourers, retained considerable attraction for the

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<sup>107</sup> L'Opinió, 26 March, 5 November 1933, 15 May, 9 August 1934

<sup>108</sup> For an analysis of these views see Frank Heathcote, 'Social Disorganisation Theories' in Mike Fitzgerald, Gregor McLennan and Jennie Pawson (eds.), Crime and Society, London, 1990, pp.341-370.

young, single and unskilled, whose rough world of labour extended to the bars and cabarets by night. Though they were loathed as a base for illegal activities by newcomers to the city, these 'doss-houses', like the Barri xino itself, remained integral features of the casualised local economy. Moreover, the strength of the irregular or 'hidden' economy, the illegality of which was the source of so much trauma for bourgeois-Republican moralists, was a direct result of structural unemployment and the flimsy nature of the 'official' economy. Instead of moral laxity, therefore, it was the failings of the capitalist economy that conditioned illegality, both in the 1930s and before, as underlined by evidence that even a short spell of unemployment was enough to force working women into prostitution.<sup>109</sup>

The consternation of the Generalitat also reflected the concerns of the small shopkeepers on the other side of Les Rambles, who made up an important electoral constituency of the Esquerra. It was these elements, berated by Montseny for embodying 'the grey and mediocre existence of the middle bourgeoisie', who were increasingly aghast at the raucous cabarets and bars of the Barri xino and who inclined the Generalitat towards imitations of the earlier monarchical 'decency' campaigns. The contempt for popular leisure was further evidence of the anti-modernism of the Generalitat. Indeed, given that the origins of Catalan cabaret within the emerging leisure patterns of the popular classes from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards predated the epoch of mass immigration, it was absurd to portray these establishments as the creation of alien communities. Instead, the élitist snobbery of the Generalitat underlined the gulf between the Catalan government and popular culture. An example of this was the disdainful racism of the ERC towards the gypsy culture of southern Spain which was thoroughly out of step with mass tastes, during a period that is generally acclaimed as the golden era of flamenco, in which the *genre* was appreciated by Catalans and non-Catalans alike.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Front, 30 July 1932; Artigues i Vidal, Mas i Palau and Sunyol i Ferrer, El Raval, pp.51ff.; Vidiella, Los de ayer, p.133; GATCPAC, 25, 1937; Kaplan, Red City, p.85

<sup>110</sup> La Revista Blanca, 19 April 1935; Lluís Almeric (Clovis Eiméric), El hostel, la fonda, la taberna y el café en la vida Barcelonesa, Barcelona, 1945, p.67. For a vivid account of a rowdy night out in the Barri xino, including a visit to one of the 'flamenco bars', see Bueso, Recuerdos, vol.2, pp.74-83.

The official campaign against the sociability of the bars and cafés of the Barri xino and El Paral·lel also clashed with anarchist traditions in Barcelona. At the port end of El Paral·lel, near to the Barri xino, stood two bars that were highly popular with the libertarians: the expansive 'Café Espanyol' and 'La Tranquilidad', which served as a meeting-place for 'Nosotros' and included Durruti among its regular patrons. Managed by an a blacklisted anarchist militant, 'La Tranquilidad' also figured in the advertisement's section of Solidaridad Obrera and established a high profile as the 'people's café', much-frequented by the unemployed.<sup>111</sup>

By 1934 the Generalitat had eschewed much of the reformist veneer in which it had earlier coated its policies. Faced with the accumulated neglect of previous administrations in the Barri xino the ERC developed the 'Macià Plan' ('El Plà Macià'), a plan for a 'new Barcelona' that promised the regeneration of the old city. The stance of the Esquerra on the urban question is highly revealing insofar as it illuminated how the party pursued the traditionalist goal of slum clearance in what it viewed as a 'crime area'. Thus, while the 'Macià Plan' included the promise of modernity, with the construction of Bauhaus-style tower blocks in Sant Andreu, this was to accompany the demolition of large areas of the Barri xino. The forward-looking gloss of the 'Macià Plan' could not conceal the reactionary security concerns of the Catalan Republicans, who had long sought a 'complete sterilisation' of the Barri xino in the hope of defusing many of the tensions that had developed during the uncontrolled development of the city.<sup>112</sup> In this way, the unwritten assumption behind the 'Macià Plan' was the desirability of relocating 'the dangerous classes' of the Barri xino away from the city centre, where they would be more manageable for the security forces.

These same security concerns underpinned the image of Italian anarchist-playboys, a stereotype that was geared towards fostering a climate of opinion in favour of deportation policies. Journalistic fantasies about libertarian gigolos were highly

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Interestingly, the suggestion of the ERC that the flamenco bars should be closed down was eventually fulfilled by Franco.

<sup>111</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 6 March, 16 April, 17 May, 10 November 1932. Clients were not obliged to consume in 'La Tranquilidad' and the unemployed were served tap water.

<sup>112</sup> L'Opinió, 16 March 1933; Francesc Roca, El Pla Macià, Barcelona, 1977; Artigues i Vidal, Mas i Palau and Suñol i Ferrer, El Raval, pp.55-56; La Publicitat, 16 August 1933

discordant with the multiple tribulations that permeated the lives of the anarchist exiles, whose illegality bore nothing like the prizes imagined in the editorial offices of the bourgeois-Republican press. For instance, when the Rimini-born anarchist and 'celebrated robber' Alpini was shot dead by police in a gunfight on El Paral·lel, only 30 pesetas were on his person, a pitiful amount for the 'author of countless robberies'.<sup>113</sup>

The crude identification between immigrants and illegality similarly failed to stand up to scrutiny. A cursory survey of the names of defendants in court cases shows that members of established Catalan families in Barcelona entered the 'expropriation' squads. Despite this, the bourgeois-Republican press continued to uphold the politically expedient hypothesis that immigrants were importing crime into Catalonia by detailing the birthplace of non-Catalan felons, while avoiding comment on Catalan deviants, occasionally even *Castilianising* their surnames.<sup>114</sup>

Moral panics that equated the demise of the family and unsupervised immigrant youths with anarchist 'disorder' were also based more in propaganda than in reality. In fact, the examples of libertarian family dynasties in Catalonia indicates that in many cases the very cohesion of the family structure served to transmit anarchist values from one generation to the next. Among the anarchist intellectuals, there is the example of the Urales family. Meanwhile, in the realms of action, there were the Cuadrado's, the Playans's, the Sabater's, all of whom were Catalans from La Torrassa in l'Hospitalet. Equally, Martorell, Latorre Morales, the Marín family and Pedro and Eugenio Larrosa, were members of the Confederal Defence Committees 'expropriation' squads in the 1930s and originated from Barcelona families with long traditions of anarchist and syndical activity.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> El Noticiero Universal, 16 April 1934

<sup>114</sup> First names like Jordi, Josep, Francesc and Cristofor and surnames like Piera, Sabater, Subirats and Lleixà were commonplace among the expropriators: La Vanguardia, 6 April 1932, 21 April, 6, 23 June, 13-14, 28 December 1933, 22 February, 3 April, 19, 25 July, 5 August, 27 December 1934, 3 January, 14, 31 May, 27 August 1935; La Publicitat, 11 April, 11 May 1934; La Veu de Catalunya, 3, 21 April 1934; Las Noticias, 12 January 1932, 6 May 1934; La Humanitat, 5 June 1933

<sup>115</sup> 'In Catalonia the anarchists were nearly always from known families': García Oliver, El eco, pp.30, 61, 469; La Vanguardia, 8-11 August 1923, 6 April 1932, 21 April, 14, 28 December 1933, 2 January, 22 February, 7 December 1934, 8-9 January 1935; Solidaridad Obrera, 9, 24 August 1923; Las Noticias, 4 June 1931, 12 January 1932; El Matí, 4 June 1931; Foix, Los archivos, p.43; La Publicitat, 11 May 1934, 8-9 January 1935; Porcell, La revuelta, pp.128-129; Ferrer and Piera, Piera, pp.130-131; L'Opinió, 2 January 1934



It is a further irony that the family structure, so often associated with the stability of the existing order, sometimes gave considerable coherence to the anarchist *grupos*. For instance, it was common for brothers to picket together in the same squads. The deep solidarity that ran through the proletarian family also provided immense stability for some of the 'expropriation' squads, in which brothers often collaborated. The arrest of one *grupo* saw the detention of three brothers, one of whom was 'quartermaster' to a squad that included his two younger brothers. There was even a case of father and son working together in the same 'expropriation' squad.<sup>116</sup>

The 'moral panics' obscured the intimate connections between patterns of youth illegality and the social conditions of the Catalan proletariat. For all the moral concerns of the Generalitat and the bourgeois-Republican press for proletarian youths, the lot of young workers remained far from pleasant. Throughout the Republican years ill-trained young workers continued to face the worst conditions of all the proletariat, accounting for a disproportionate number of industrial accidents. In his memoirs Emili Salut describes 'a tormented youth', produced by a series of repressive experiences in the family and the factory, in a hostile urban landscape dominated by the oppressive barracks-style architecture of the workshops, workhouses and prisons. Although the Republicans had vowed to end child labour and provide a new deal for the young, judicial will remained subordinate to prevailing economic laws and proletarian children remained an integral part of the labour force. The failure to provide immediate relief to the poorest and most disadvantaged sectors of the proletariat vitiated against any new educational opportunities and schooling remained an unacceptable luxury for the majority of working class families, who continued to send their youngest members out to work in order to expand the family budget. Indeed, cognisant of the life of labour that

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<sup>116</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 6 January, 4 April, 3, 6, 23 June, 18 August, 31 October, 13 December 1933, 5 August, 22, 27 December 1934, 4, 9 January, 14, 31 May 1935; *Las Noticias*, 14-20 January, 16-17 May 1931, 6-8, 23 May 1934, 4-5 February 1936; *La Humanitat*, 5 June 1933; *La Veu de Catalunya*, 6 January 1933, 6 March 1934; *La Publicitat*, 1 April 1934, 4, 9 January 1935; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 August 1932, 25 April 1936; Léon-Ignaci, *Los años*, p.298

lay ahead of their children, there is evidence that many working class parents continued to regard education as an irrelevance.<sup>117</sup>

Rather than explain the behaviour of anarchist youth in terms of a badly socialised childhood, many young workers gravitated towards libertarianism because of the myriad sufferings of their formative years. Those who began a life of work but yet retained a desire to study, were ineluctably drawn towards the proletarian Ateneus, particularly in the poorest zones of Barcelona and l'Hospitalet, where educational provision was in short supply and demand for places far outstripped supply. Meanwhile, penurious and gruelling youth labour inclined many towards youth rebellion, explaining why some paid-up union members were as young as ten years of age. For García Oliver, it was the disgust at being forced to 'clean the shit of others' in hotels that impelled him towards a life of protest and he first joined a *grupo de afinidad* at the age of 17.<sup>118</sup>

The rebellion of the young was sometimes directed against the parents who pushed them into the industrial system. It was not uncommon for children who regarded their lot in the factories as the outcome of parental control to run away from the family. Equally, it was not unusual for children who refused to work for a given employer to be thrown onto the street by their parents for being shiftless. The Republican state continued to incarcerate these 'runaway children' in municipal workhouses or children's homes, where the emphasis was on the discipline and control of 'bad behaviour', rather than the transmission of educational or labour skills that might prove useful in the outside world. These institutions were brutalising and by night the internees were locked into dormitories, where youths would sleep on mattresses on the floor. Ironically, even during the laicist Republic the municipal children's homes were staffed by the clergy, who maintained a repressive ambience based on the religious orthodoxy that work provided the healthiest way for regenerating lost souls. Consequently, it was not

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<sup>117</sup> Soto Carmona, *El trabajo*, pp.673-675; Salut, *Viveres*, pp.9, 42, 45, 47, 57; Ramon Navarro, *L'educació a Catalunya durant la Generalitat, 1931-1939*, Barcelona, 1979, pp.13-94, 143-164; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 23 July 1931

<sup>118</sup> *L'Opinió*, 5 July 1934; Dolors Marín, 'Una primera aproximació a la vida quotidiana dels Hospitalencs: 1920-1929. Les històries de vida com a font històrica', *Identitats*, 4-5, 1990, pp.32-35; Ealham, 'Crime and Punishment', pp.34-36; Ferrer and Piera, *Piera*, pp.22-25; García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.24, 28

uncommon for youth to work unpaid for 10 hours daily in the dingy workshops of the children's homes of Barcelona, particularly the notorious Asil Durán. Although this 'therapy' was lucrative for those business interests who invested in the children's homes, it was a form of hyper-exploitation that almost certainly exceeded that which the youths had initially rebelled against. The homes were, therefore, despised by the youths, as was the clergy who allegedly meted out beatings to those who dared challenge the régime, and who was frequently accused of sexual abuse.<sup>119</sup>

Upon release from a workhouse or a children's home, youths had enormous difficulties re-integrating themselves in everyday life, particularly as they often lacked accommodation or a fixed address without which it they could not obtain regular employment. The experience in these homes, therefore, often stimulated new heights of rebellion among youths and through their harsh contact with the state a number of the detainees became anarchists. Former detainees in the Asil Durán included 'Marianet', the secretary of the Barcelona Builders' union, Martorell, the 'Public Enemy Number One', and 'El Nan de Sants', a 17-year old libertarian escapee and, according to La Publicitat, the 'author of several robberies'.<sup>120</sup>

In the same way as the Generalitat 'moral panics' about youth crime and the Barri xino illustrated a readiness to accept the same apprehensions as previous monarchist administrations, so too did its obfuscation of the divisions between social protest and criminal behaviour. The erosion of this distinction had been a classical theme of bourgeois criminologists since the advent of labour organisation. In similar vein, the objections felt by the Generalitat towards anarchist excursionism, one of the last activities open to the followers of the CNT-FAI for much of 1934, had little to do with illegality. Instead, this was a thinly veiled pretext to eliminate the world-view that had grown up around the anarchist movement and which was seen as incompatible with autonomous Catalan institutions.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> La Publicitat, 4 January 1935; Solidaridad Obrera, 6 December 1932, 8 August 1933

<sup>120</sup> La Publicitat, 4 January 1935; Téllez Solá, Sabaté, p. 24; La Veu de Catalunya, 27 April 1934

<sup>121</sup> La Vanguardia, 31 March 1934; La Veu de Catalunya, 26 April 1934

The journalism of Planes, the La Publicitat crime reporter, lent itself to this same end and he replaced sociology with morality in order to decontextualise the origins of urban criminality. Thereafter, by exclusively identifying crime with the anarchist movement, Planes generated both an inaccurate and a simplistic picture of the 'underworld'. Firstly, he ignored the fact that from at least the 1880s even conservative commentators recognised the existence of a 'typical' popular criminality with 'profound roots' in the Catalan capital. Secondly, Planes omitted all mention of the criminal behaviour of the 'respectable classes'. Thus, Planes completely ignored what he described as 'the aristocracy of the gangsters' which, from World War One onwards, was deemed by a wide spectrum of opinion, from the anarchists right across to the conservatives, to be the most anti-social elements within the 'underworld'. This Toulouse and Marseilles-based élite, which specialised in cocaine and opium smuggling, money-laundering, counterfeiting and high-class prostitution, was also believed to occasionally mastermind armed robberies in Barcelona. However, because these felonious 'aristocrats' had no apparent contact with the anarchist movement they did not fit with Planes's overriding intention to portray the libertarians as the greatest danger to law-and-order.<sup>122</sup> A final weakness in the interpretation offered by Planes was the enormous responsibility he placed on the so-called 'Black Hand' ('La mano negra'), a criminal organisation which he believed had deep tentacles in the Barcelona 'underworld'. It is curious, therefore, that no other contemporary commentators made even a passing reference to this group which, ironically, shared the name of another phantom-like conspiracy evoked by the authorities in Andalusia in the nineteenth century to smash the emerging organisational structures of the anarchist movement.<sup>123</sup>

Again, it is evident that the 'crime panics' of the authorities and their supporters obscured the real determinants of illegality. For instance, the concept of an 'underworld'

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<sup>122</sup> Gil Maestre, La criminalidad, p.202; Vallmitjana, Criminalitat, *passim*.; El Escándolo, 10 December 1925; Solidaridad Obrera, 15 April, 31 August 1934; La Noche, 16 November 1931; La Publicitat, 22 January 1932, 11 April 1934

<sup>123</sup> Another possibility is that Planes was employing considerable journalistic licence and referring to the largely USA-based Italian secret society known as the 'Black Hand', which was linked to the Sicilian mafia. However, while the 'Black Hand' of *mafiosi* fame possessed an international dimension, one of the leading historians of the mafia makes no reference to it ever establishing any activities in Barcelona: Salvatore Francesco Romano, Historia de la mafia, Madrid, 1970, pp.239-254.

served to ignore a number of the criminogenic aspects of bourgeois society, particularly the way in which employers strove to exclude convicted offenders, *quintzenaris* and those who had been interned without trial from the workplace. Although some bourgeois penal reformers had long campaigned for conditions that might allow for the full reformation of criminals, this exclusive mentality was transmitted into the Republic, during which the bourgeois-Republican press accepted that convicted offenders, and even some who had simply fallen under the suspicion of the police, were morally bankrupt and unemployable. This same inquisitorial mentality resulted in cases where those under suspicion of illegality were sacked, blacklisted and even evicted from their flats. By dooming convicted felons and police suspects to a life sentence on the margins of society, employers and the authorities made their own 'underclass' and created illegality. In this sense, rather than 'underclass' culture, it was unforgiving bourgeois social attitudes and the barriers this placed when attempting to secure work, such as the prerequisite of a 'letter of recommendation' from a recent employer, which helps explain high levels of recidivism. Accordingly, once an individual was either branded or merely suspected of being a 'criminal', it was very difficult for them to attain a stable economic position that did not arouse the need to re-offend. In these circumstances, to use police parlance, the 'criminal' became 'hardened'.<sup>124</sup>

Most importantly of all, however, the concept of an 'underclass' reversed the causes of unemployment and poverty. By postulating that long-term unemployment was caused by individual degeneracy and deviancy rather than the contradictions of the capitalist system, concrete socio-economic problems were transformed into moral issues. Equally, the logic of the web of official myths and misrepresentations that comprised the 'moral panics' discounted the need to cut unemployment and reduce inequality, as to do otherwise presupposed embracing the view that illegality was of an economic, rather than a moral basis, a starting-point which provided the basis for a critique of existing socio-economic relations. Thus, it was preferable for the authorities to maintain that an

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<sup>124</sup> *La Batalla*, 23 September 1934; *La Publicitat*, 16 August 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 28 January, 5 September 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 September 1932, 21 September 1932; *Las Noticias*, 17 June, 3 November 1931; *L'Opinió*, 11 August 1931

'underclass' was for its own lot because it had chosen of its own free volition to live 'underworld'.

Nevertheless, the expansion of armed illegality in 1930s Barcelona was inseparable from the vicissitudes of the economy and, like in industrial conurbations elsewhere, it was bound up with the expansion of the capitalist metropolis. Already in 1931 the CDE revealed that thousands of proletarians in the Catalan capital were denied a regular existence by rising joblessness, while many thousands more were living in considerable financial discomfort. The economic situation had deteriorated considerably and it was the spread of unemployment that forced many workers to change their behaviour, swelling what the authorities described as a criminal 'underworld'. However, what the Generalitat saw as a criminal universe of scoundrels would have been unrecognisable to the great majority of those who inhabited it. For instance, under examination the sinister 'undocumented' youths castigated by the Generalitat as an 'underworld' force were little more than itinerant labourers and low-paid or unemployed workers who often did not bother to keep their documentation in order as they lacked the money to do so. Far from confirming the official image of illegality as the preserve of an 'underworld' of 'professional' and 'hardened' villains, an extensive reading of the legal pages of the daily press during the Republican years reveals that many 'crimes against property' were committed by the short-term unemployed. Equally, the world of bars and 'doss houses' that petrified the authorities was not an 'underworld' of the 'professional', full-time 'aristocrats of crime', but the preserve of young, short-term unemployed workers, the majority of whom lacked both an established trade and a home, a situation that led them to turn to illegality as a necessary and passing expedient during a time of mass unemployment. Hence, these 'expropriators' were the direct product of the gross inequalities generated by the local capitalist economy and its failure to fulfil the most basic needs of large sectors of the workers in the city. Barcelona, therefore, was a

criminogenic city, in which everyday life for the jobless was a daily struggle that compelled many to steal to survive.<sup>125</sup>

The press coverage of illegality revealed that offenders were often the fathers of families, unable to provide for their kith because of unemployment and pressurised into illegality by dint of their very sense of domestic and familial responsibility. In such cases, illegality took place not because of the absence of family ties but, because capitalism could not guarantee the stable functioning of the proletarian home. Moreover, just as the working class family economy was based on contributions from all members, so too was the economy of the unemployed family. Accordingly, in the same way as harsh economic realities denied a childhood to young proletarians by forcing them into the workforce, so the privations of joblessness led children, sometimes as young as ten, into illegality. These child offenders were often not the 'runaway children' who formed the street gangs of conservative mythology, but stable members of the family unit so revered by bourgeois social thinkers.<sup>126</sup>

The 'moral panics' of the Republican authorities were clearly not formulated as a coherent or rational whole. Instead, like so much official discourse, the exclusive purpose of the panics was to galvanise a consensus in favour of repression. The talk of a criminal 'underworld' was predicated on the assumption that nothing positive could be done to help the poor, it was a baseless conservative discourse designed to spread a fear of crimes which in reality affected a minute proportion of the population. Equally, the tirade against the 'underclass' aimed to convince individuals that however bad their lot in life was, it could in fact be worse if they made the descent into hell with the immoral residuum of society.

The same repressive discourse postulated that there was a coincidence between the 'dangerous classes' of the 'underworld' and the anarchists. The view that moral degenerates were attacking the citizenry was highly useful for the bid by the Generalitat

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<sup>125</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 28 August 1934; Las Noticias, 16 June 1931, 2 January 1936; Communique from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 11 March 1936 (AHLL); La Vanguardia, 15 March, 11 August 1933

<sup>126</sup> Communiques from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 4 August 1934, 21 June 1936 (AHLL)

to integrate better-off workers into a conservative anti-crime bloc and earn wider acquiescence for increasing police powers. In this sense, the 'respectable fears' accentuated the growing dynamics of repression and authoritarianism already at work within the Generalitat in 1934. Moreover, this consolidated the process begun in 1931 with the promulgation of the *Ley de Defensa de la República* and the anti-CNT labour legislation implemented by Largo Caballero. The Generalitat, like Largo Caballero before, asserted that the FAI had imposed itself through terror on what saw as essentially peaceful Catalan workers. The conclusion was also the same: if the anarchists could be forcibly isolated from the labour movement, normality and order would be re-introduced in social, economic and political affairs.<sup>127</sup> Thus, the allegations that anarchism was an essentially felonious ideology reflected the burning desire of the Generalitat to introduce a complete ban on the libertarian movement, its press and the 'spiritual bread' they received from the Ateneus.

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<sup>127</sup> *L'Opinió*, 24, 27 April 1933, 19 April 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1 August 1933



## Chapter 7: Class Culture and Illegality

### 7.1. 'Criminal Capitalism'

The schism between the authorities and the CNT-FAI over the issue of illegality produced a major re-statement of the libertarian conception of crime and punishment by the Catalan anarchists. Firstly, the anarchists rejected deterministic pseudo-Lombrosian concepts such as that of the 'born criminal' and the accompanying view that the dimensions of the jaw bone influenced the criminal passions of a given individual. Similarly, they also countered the conservative notions of 'degeneration' and 'evil' that conditioned a considerable amount of Republican thinking on law-and-order. Solidaridad Obrera retorted that 'there is no such thing as "good" and "bad" people, only people who are "good" and "bad" at different times'. This view was underpinned by the libertarian orthodoxy that social behaviour was conditioned by circumstance and context. Consequently, the anarchists defended the inhabitants of the Barri xino from bourgeois-Republican allegations that they were the 'perishing classes'. Montseny celebrated the Barri xino both as a centre of popular repose and for the spirit of resistance shown by those who led 'an errant life outside the law' on its 'mean streets'. Rather than an 'underclass', Montseny lauded the 'goodness' of what she regarded as a community of 'pariahs' that had repeatedly carried the banner of freedom, for which 'the streets were stained with so much proletarian blood'.<sup>1</sup>

The second element of the anarchist conception of illegality was that crime, in all its manifestations, was inseparable from the capitalist system. In short, illegality was 'the product of a pernicious social organisation' and the 'holocaust of a society that is the patrimony of a social class that impoverishes and scoffs at the human race'. Thus, Solidaridad Obrera maintained, 'bourgeois society is responsible for all crime' because its distribution mechanism of 'privileges for the few and persecutions and privations for the rest establishes sharp differences in terms of material position, education and lifestyle, which shape both professional and occasional criminality'. The anarchists explained certain forms of illegality by the specific features of local capitalism. For instance, the

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<sup>1</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 9 April 1933, 20 March 1934, 15 September 1935; La Revista Blanca, 19 April 1935

question of youth illegality that so preoccupied bourgeois-Republican social thinkers was viewed as a concomitant of sweated, low-paid child labour that 'compelled' the young to commit crime.<sup>2</sup>

On a subjective level, the libertarians saw much crime as a reflection of the acquisitive mentalities that were spontaneously generated by capitalist society. Not without irony, the anarchist press argued that the desire for individual self-advancement, an attitude that was widely encouraged by many bourgeois commentators as an antidote to 'subversive' collectivist ideologies, paradoxically generated a climate that favoured 'crimes against property' among the poorest echelons of society. It was unlikely that even stoical unskilled proletarians could reap any significant, long-term material rewards by remaining within the law, nor attain the trappings of success that the supporters of bourgeois society extolled so forcefully. These paradoxes led 'Marianet', the Builders' Union leader, to observe that 'in a society that legalises usury and has robbery as its basis, it is logical that there will be some who are prepared to risk their lives and commit with audacity what others do with the protection of coercive state forces'.<sup>3</sup>

The libertarians attributed the upsurge in illegality in the 1930s to the decline of capitalist society. Marin Civera, one of the most original thinkers from the revolutionary left during the 1930s, explained the spread of crime not in moral terms, but as an exclusive and inevitable function of the haemorrhage of an economic order based on private property. For Civera, and his co-thinkers, illegality was a moral issue only insofar as it affected the bourgeoisie, whose egoistic conscience accepted both the systematic theft (appropriation) of a part of proletarian travail and the expulsion of large numbers of operatives from work. By denying workers the chance to survive from their labour, illegality became an increasingly realistic option for a significant section of the proletariat, in the view of Civera.<sup>4</sup>

It followed, therefore, that much illegality was the outcome of the material needs of newly unemployed workers. The anarchist press issued a firm defence of the short-

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<sup>2</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 24 July, 9 September, 16 December 1932, 15 January, 25 March, 18 August 1933, 6 December 1935; Tierra y Libertad, 24 December 1935

<sup>3</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 26 April 1934

<sup>4</sup> Orto, May 1932

term unemployed who resorted to 'occasional criminality', placing the blame instead on avaricious capitalists who provoked robbery by depriving the unemployed their rightful place at the 'banquet of life'. This, according to the libertarians, forced a confrontation between the 'right to life' and the rights of property but, because the 'right to life' was stronger, and morally justifiable, illegality was a 'natural right' and a part of the 'struggle for life' for those who lacked what was 'necessary to live'.<sup>5</sup>

Inverting the agenda of the bourgeois-Republican thinkers, the libertarians maintained that the passing illegality of proletarians paved into insignificance alongside the everyday felonies committed by the capitalist class. As Solidaridad Obrera explained, 'there is no case of an employer who gives his workers the full value of the wealth which they produce'. Accordingly, in the anarchist lexicon 'commerce substitutes the word robbery', while 'trade' was little more than a euphemism for 'trickery', 'deceit' and 'theft'. Capitalism was, therefore, a 'criminal economy', based on 'the principle of property' and rooted in 'speculation and robbery'. The CNT press popularised this view, maintaining that 'the whole of society rests on exploitation' by the bourgeoisie, the 'aristocracy of robbery', who had elevated villainy to the level of economic policy. Echoing the claims of the CDE, Solidaridad Obrera raged against a system in which the worker who 'has nothing and produces everything' was systematically robbed by the employers and by 'traffickers in the misery of the people' and the 'scandalous businesses of the profiteers', such as the shopkeepers and landlords. In similar vein, Balius, a leading Barcelona *faísta*, advised the detractors of anarchism 'to examine the bourgeois régime and they will come to realise that existing society is a society organised by robbers. From the small shopkeeper to the industrialist, right up to the most powerful capitalist consortiums, there is nothing but speculation which, in plain language, means robbery'. For Balius, capitalists, unlike the urban poor, were able to hide their crimes with their money, because 'by paying a few pesetas, [they] can achieve comfortably what the hold-up man attains only through great personal danger'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tierra y Libertad, 26 April 1932; Solidaridad Obrera, 14 February 1935

<sup>6</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 22 March, 23 September, 23 November 1932, 8, 14 March, 18 April, 23 June 1933, 24 April 1934

The libertarians scoffed at the panics of the bourgeoisie about the 'criminal danger' to capitalist civilisation, asserting that the crimes of the unemployed were of minimal importance alongside bourgeois pursuits like war and imperialism, both of which were far more destructive for human life. For the anarchists, the civilisation of the bourgeoisie was a sad anachronism, a cynical contradiction in terms, which allowed for 'a world of the superfluous' for those 'swimming in opulence', while 'many thousands of workers are dying of hunger' in Barcelona, along with millions the world over who faced the famine, homelessness and unemployment. The 'criminal' nature of capitalism was documented in the pages of Solidaridad Obrera, which reported bourgeois counter-crisis measures, such as the destruction of unsold foodstuffs, known as 'dumping'. The libertarians took this as a reaffirmation of the 'immorality' of a society in which the rich allegedly spent more on dog food and perfume than workers spent on food.<sup>7</sup>

Homelessness was another 'repugnant crime' reviled by the anarchists. Solidaridad Obrera regularly complained that alongside the few who lived in a state of plenitude, 'thousands and thousands of hungry, homeless people eat the filth from the streets and sleep on park benches'. Using the same adjective employed by the bourgeois-Republican press to describe the 'expropriations', Solidaridad Obrera spoke of the 'plague' of evictions that ravaged the unemployed. The anarchists also observed how pious bourgeois moralists 'tell us of morality and organise crusades against crime' but remained 'quiet' in the face of 'the collective crime' of capitalism, a duplicity that was to brothel-keepers bemoaning transgressions of public mores. It was precisely this 'false' bourgeois morality 'cemented around respect for the "nation", "property", "family", "state", "religion" and all its derivatives' which, the libertarians believed, 'strengthens the social chaos against which we are pitting ourselves'. The contradictions of bourgeois morality were the object of savage derision by the anarchists. Initiatives such as the formation of 'Parents Leagues' to control youths were the object of particular mockery. Following a case where a 14 year-old worker was arbitrarily dismissed and violently assaulted by his employer for demanding a statutory redundancy payment, Solidaridad

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<sup>7</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 28 August, 4 September 1932, 16, 18 April 1934, 3 December 1935; Tierra y Libertad, 7 November, 5 December 1931, 1 July, 9 September, 30 December 1932

Obrera published the name and address of the irascible capitalist and suggested wryly that a proletarian 'League of Parents' should pay him a visit.<sup>8</sup>

The furore over illegality also saw a reiteration of the anarchist conception of law in a capitalist society. Instead of talking of the law in abstract terms like the Republicans, the anarchists spoke concretely of 'bourgeois law', which they understood as a form of class law, with a historically specific theoretical-judicial content that regulated the limited freedoms of capitalist society. Like everything else in the bourgeois world, therefore, legal liberties were subordinate to the limitations imposed by economic factors and reaffirmed the status of the proletariat as a propertyless class. Solidaridad Obrera explained that in bourgeois society workers enjoyed only 'three freedoms':

'freedom to eat or not to eat, freedom to have heat or to have cold, freedom to have a roof or not to have one...But not freedom to touch the food, wheat, machinery [and], land that they need to live. If they touch these they face jail or the pistols of the police'.

Meanwhile, it was alleged that capitalists and bankers, 'the real thieves and the true racketeers of the human race', were accepted by bourgeois law as 'necessary robbers' and were allowed to operate as 'legal thieves' specialising in 'legal crime'. This 'respectable crime', the most shameful of all crimes in the view of the anarchists, was 'a [bourgeois] virtue practised within the law and respected the world over' by 'the most vile of all criminals' who 'live splendidly protected' by their lawyers. These 'pirates and modern-day bandits spend their lives in comfortable offices' or ensconced in 'the palaces of the state bureaucracy', and like the arms manufacturers who enriched themselves among 'rivers of blood', they 'shy away from no measure, however odious, in the conquest of power and money', extracting wealth from 'the sweat and blood spilt in fields, workshops, factories and mines'. The major accessories in this 'legal robbery' were the 'murderers' and 'criminals in the pay of the state' who comprised the security forces and 'who worship robbery on a grand scale'. Rather than end crime, therefore, the police were regarded by the libertarians as a parasitic force that produced nothing but yet lived securely from the taxes 'stolen' from the wages of the proletariat, the very people against whom it was

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<sup>8</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 15 January, 24 May, 24, 30 July, 2 August, 8 December 1932

deployed to repress. Hence, the anarchists concluded, for all its repressive brutality, the efforts of the police to end crime were misguided, because they were not directed against the real causes of illegality, which were embedded within the very socio-economic system defended by the security forces.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas the bourgeois-Republican press emphasised the illegality of the lower classes, Solidaridad Obrera was keen to prove that criminality was not the exclusive pursuit of the much-maligned proletarian class. With considerable investigative verve the CNT daily assiduously reported infractions of the criminal code by those described by the anarchists as the 'controllors' of Republican society. As well the drunken violence of off-duty policemen already mentioned, this coverage included cases of robbery by prison wardens, acts of embezzlement by lawyers, corruption by Generalitat politicians, 'administrative immorality' by ERC 'gangsters' in Barcelona Council and violent business disagreements between shopkeepers. In an emotional tone that mirrored the coverage of armed robbery in the bourgeois and Republican dailies, the CNT press gave considerable space to so-called offences 'prejudicial to the sacred health of the people' and 'robberies committed against the working people'. According to the anarchists, these were 'crimes' perpetrated by the 'legion of parasites', 'blood-suckers' (*chupasangres*) and 'vultures' from the commercial middle class, who the anarchists accused of 'trading in the physical necessities of humanity' and 'picking dry the ill-fated body of the worker'. These were matched with denunciations of 'villainous' landlords who charged 'criminal' rents and 'stole' the deposits of outgoing tenants, and stories of overcharging bar-owners who diluted drinks and shopkeepers who meddled with food and weights. This was grist to the anarchist mill and heightened their view that the commercial classes were essentially criminal. Solidaridad Obrera asserted that:

'if they [the authorities] analysed the foodstuffs sold daily to the public all these people with private guards and security doors on their houses would go to jail...Every shop, warehouse [and] workshop is a den of villainy. The robbers are the owners..."honourable" folk and gentlemen who go to mass on

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<sup>9</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 22 March, 30 July, 23 November, 7 December 1932, 8, 14 March, 1 April, 23 June, 8 August 1933; La Colmena Obrera, 30 October 1931; Tierra y Libertad, 16 September, 8 December 1932, 9 June, 25 August 1933

Sunday morning and visit their lovers in the afternoon...[the] very gentlemen who are outraged when a poor, needy man steals a loaf of bread to feed his children, while they rob with weights and measures and steal even the air and the sun of the dispossessed'.<sup>10</sup>

Solidaridad Obrera revealed the partialities of the Republican penal system, showing how the lucrative crimes of the privileged and the powerful frequently went uninvestigated or received fines, while trivial working class crimes were regularly punished with jail sentences. The widespread tax evasion of the middle classes that was documented by the CDE in 1931 and was confirmed by further exposés in Solidaridad Obrera provides a clear example of this pattern. Tax evasion rarely preoccupied the authorities and while tax-cheating landlords, some of whose taxes were allegedly 13 years or more in arrears, remained at liberty, while workers were locked up for acts of petty pilfering, such as potato or chicken theft. There was also a considerable difference in police attitudes towards criminality and the frequent maltreatment and assault of unemployed felons in police in custody contrasted sharply with the treatment of middle class detainees. Punishment and jail were, therefore, seen as fates almost exclusively reserved for the proletariat and Solidaridad Obrera maintained that hopes of justice in bourgeois society were as realistic as expectations of survival inside 'a third degree tuberculosis camp'.<sup>11</sup>

The duplicitous stance of the authorities reflected fears that premature or sustained police action against bourgeois crime and middle class fraud could undermine business confidence and imperil what was an already weakened economy. In other words, non-proletarian crime was effectively regarded by the authorities as a slight imperfection of a free enterprise system which, over time, would be eradicated from within the commercial class, without intervention from the state. In practice, this effectively legitimated the criminal actions of the monied classes. The rare occasions when the police did punish middle class crime concerned misdemeanours that were so gross that they could not be ignored and where non-intervention would seriously compromise the standing of the authorities. For instance, while food adulteration was

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<sup>10</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 15 January, 23 June, 8, 15, 27 October, 20 December 1932, 24 April, 26 August 1934, 26 November 1935; El Luchador, 7 July 1933

<sup>11</sup> La Publicitat, 10 January 1932; Solidaridad Obrera, 4 November 1932, 1 August 1933, 6 March 1936

often tolerated, police were forced to make an arrest after a shopkeeper mixed flour with barium sulphate and lead carbonate and left 800 consumers bed-ridden.<sup>12</sup>

The failure of the authorities to repress criminal shopkeepers or to protect consumers deepened the hostility of the anarchists towards what they condemned as 'the Republic of rich layabouts' (*chupópteros*) and a 'régime of murderers'. Moreover, the tolerance of the Republican authorities and the police towards the 'crimes of the powerful' was not viewed by the libertarians as an aberration. Instead, they averred it was bound up with the very nature of the Republic and its favouritism of the middle classes. This view was strengthened by the fact that like in the monarchy, police stereotypes of offenders were based exclusively on the characteristics of the urban working class male. Not surprisingly, the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes* was cited by the anarchists as the most vivid example of the 'classist' nature of Republican law. In the opinion of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the promulgation of this law meant that 'to be badly dressed' was a crime, thereby confirming that 'all the coercive measures that surround the penal code of monarchies and Republics are established to castigate the rebellion of the slaves'. This was taken to reaffirm the axiom that bourgeois law, irrespective of the form of state, was, as *Tierra y Libertad* expressed, the 'historic caprice of a specific class', a device for the submission of the majority to a minority which was allowed to 'rob on a daily basis to increase its wealth'.<sup>13</sup>

Crime, therefore, in the opinion of the anarchists, was socially determined and historically conditioned by the prevailing relations between social classes. It followed, therefore, that what the law defined as 'murder' was not always a criminal offence. Instead, the anarchists maintained that the violent killing of an individual acquired the label of 'murder' only after the act had been interpreted and classified by a series of socio-legal agencies. To underline the socially determined nature of crime and killing, the libertarians invoked the historic example of the Spanish conquest of South America. Although the carnage and cultural genocide of the 'plunderers', 'bandits' and 'slayers of

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<sup>12</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 November 1935

<sup>13</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 August 1932, 26 February, 23 June 1933, 8 July, 1934; *Tierra y Libertad*, 16 September 1932, 7 November 1931



natives' accounted for millions more fatalities than flying pickets or 'expropriators', the libertarians observed the irony that the *conquistadores* were labelled as 'heroes' by the upper classes and the political right and, for all their bloody slaughter, they occupied a central place within nationalist mythology. Meanwhile, this same social process allowed the state judiciary to treat the fatal shooting of a 'scab' by a picket during an industrial conflict as 'murder'. By comparison, the libertarians opined with enormous justification that the killing of a picket by a member of the security forces was most unlikely to reach the courts, let alone be defined as 'homicide'. Hence, Solidaridad Obrera believed, for a policeman, killing becomes 'a laudable act, in compliance with their duties'. In the same way, just as the theft of unpaid labour was 'legal', the proletarian 'expropriators' were branded 'illegal', as they represented a threat to the propertied core of capitalist society.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, the anarchists attempted to expose the contradictions of the 'pain and violence' and 'egoistic and punitive conceptions' inherent to the 'bourgeois judicial concept of punishment'. Rather than rehabilitating, 'state revenge' merely labelled individuals as 'offenders' and thereby created 'criminals'. This was the retribution of a 'perverse society' that 'converted men into beasts' by criminalising and isolating offenders in jails where they became brutalised and dehumanised and, when they left jail, permanently marginalised. Solidaridad Obrera concluded that 'Law is the enemy of real society' because 'nothing is solved with the jailing of the so-called common prisoners'. According to Luigi Fabbri, one of the doyens of anarchism in the 1930s, only the complete abolition of law and prisons and the elimination of the monopoly of property could eliminate 'the economic causes of crime'. Only then, Fabbri reasoned, in the stateless, libertarian society, could the 'pinnacle of true justice' be attained, as crime would disappear through the emergence of truly stable communities capable of regulating themselves, without the intervention of the police or other extraneous forces.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tierra y Libertad, 26 April 1931; Solidaridad Obrera, 23 June 1932, 7 April 1934

<sup>15</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 26 August, 16 September 1932, 14 March 1933, 15 April 1934; Tiempos Nuevos, 21, 28 March 1935

## 7.2. The 'Moral Economy' of the Barcelona Proletariat

The anarchist view of illegality fitted very closely with the experiences of broad sectors of the Barcelona working class. This was particularly true for the thousands of predominantly unskilled, badly paid or unemployed proletarians who regarded the CNT-FAI as the best possible vehicle for their aspirations. Since World War One the collective memory of these workers had been shaped by struggles against the shopkeepers and landlords of Barcelona. This process was heightened by the organisational development of the revolutionary labour organisations and campaigns like the World War One *abaratimiento*, the CDE and the BOC-inspired 'Workers' Alliance Against Unemployment', all of which were instrumental in the articulation of an exclusively proletarian moral code, based on a distinct set of priorities to the ethical catechisms of the bourgeois-Republican press.<sup>16</sup>

The context of everyday life for the Barcelona proletariat broadly corresponded to the anarchist view of small commercial sectors and the bourgeoisie as 'criminal classes' who had submitted fundamental human needs like shelter, food and work to a ruthless business ethic. Burdened by the legacy of a traditionally low wage economy, Barcelona's workers also faced shopkeepers whose retail prices were widely believed to be inflated grossly above wholesale costs. As confirmed by official statistics, throughout the years of the Republic the cost of living in the Catalan capital was higher than any of place in the entire Spanish state and staple elements of the working class diet like bread, cooking oil, potatoes and eggs were all markedly more expensive in Barcelona than in Madrid. Once tribute had been paid to the landlords and shopkeepers many proletarians, particularly the jobless, were forced to deal with money-lenders and pawn-brokers.<sup>17</sup>

The *vox populi* also assimilated the reality that the Catholic, middle class 'lovers of order' showed little Christian understanding when it came to evicting tenants from their properties. Moreover, cases of adulterated foodstuffs and the contravention of tax laws could only have convinced workers that the self-proclaimed 'moral classes' were

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<sup>16</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1933; *La Batalla*, 1 September, 27 October 1932; *Fam*, 10 February 1933

<sup>17</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 August 1931, 1, 20 April 1932; *Tierra y Libertad*, 19 July 1936

prepared to privately flaunt the legal code which they publicly maintained was the core of existing civilisation. For example, Pich i Pon, Barcelona's leading property owner and the head of the COPUB who cried so loudly about the 'illegality' of the CDE rent strike was popularly dubbed 'the leading pirate of Barcelona' because of his shady business interests. This reputation was reinforced in 1935 Pich i Pon acquired national notoriety in 1935 through his criminal involvement in the 'Straperlo affair', the most important corruption scandal in the history of the Republic that was based on a scheme to import doctored roulette wheels into Spain. Meanwhile, the Tayá brothers, the shipping magnates and former owners of La Publicitat, one of the most sanctimonious vehicles for the 'moral panics', were both found guilty of fraudulently acquiring lucrative government franchises for their merchant fleets.<sup>18</sup>

Nor were the Republican authorities immune from this same popular association between crime and power. Although the Republic had a certain success in curbing the 'criminal excesses' of high office which were so rife during the monarchy, corruption was never completely eradicated. In Barcelona, as well as a trickle of recurring cases of municipal impropriety, major scandals involving Esquerra Councillors in the illegal 'sale' of municipal administrative positions revealed the extent to which the ERC had retreated from its anti-graft platform of April 1931. Shamefully, the few small-scale anti-unemployment projects initiated by the Generalitat were also hindered by corruption. Dencàs, the Generalitat Interior Minister at the forefront of the drive against armed illegality, was accused of misappropriating between 37,000 and 110,000 pesetas during his tenure in the Catalan government Welfare Department. Meanwhile, in l'Hospitalet, the Catalan Republicans showed similar administrative turpitude through the illicit 'sale' of market places. Popular bitterness towards the politicians dubbed by Solidaridad Obrera as the 'criminal fauna living at the expense of the people' could only have been

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<sup>18</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 23 November 1932, 3 January 1936; Iniciales, March 1932; La Voz Confederal, 25 May 1935; The Times, 28-29 October 1935; José Miguel Fernández Urbina, 'Los "affaires" Straperlo y Tayá. Dos escándalos de la II República', Tiempo de Historia, 38, 1978, pp.18-28

enhanced by the revelations of the bumper salaries, often ten times the daily wage of a Barcelona construction worker, paid to the new Generalitat political élite.<sup>19</sup>

In the hungry years of recession-torn 1930s the 'respectable fears' for public security of the crime-obsessed bourgeois-Republican press were far removed from issues like public health, which weighed down on the lives of propertyless workers, a hazardous context that the Republican authorities seemed to be in little hurry to alter. In 1934 Adelante, the BOC daily, described Barcelona as 'the dirtiest city in Europe', a ragged metropolis beset with a burgeoning rodent population due to the corruption and graft that was allegedly rife in the distribution of public cleaning contracts. Consequently, statistically the inhabitants of the Barri xino were at greater risk from what were reputedly 'mountains of rubbish' that formed a 'black belt of pus' in the streets than from the 'criminal classes'.<sup>20</sup>

As well as a rise in cases of insanity caused by the privations of joblessness, the unskilled working class and the unemployed were stalked by an array of diseases, including as cholera, meningitis, diarrhoea, rickets, acute bronchitis, pneumonia, bronchopneumonia and enteritis, all of which were in the throes of eradication elsewhere in Europe. Moreover, the death toll generated by the aforementioned diseases in Barcelona eclipsed the fatalities caused by armed illegality and made coverage of 'murderous robberies' in the bourgeois-Republican press seem highly disproportionate. Meanwhile, the long-standing deficiencies in the water supply left Barcelona workers over 5 times more likely to contract typhoid than Madrid workers. Highlighting the failings of the Republic, the typhoid situation actually worsened in the Catalan capital during the 1930s, while child mortality rates remained three times higher than in northern countries like Holland. Indeed, in 1935 a group of physicians estimated that a staggering 70% of children in the Catalan capital showed signs of tuberculosis. This illness, described by Solidaridad Obrera as the 'social scourge that decimates the proletarian

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<sup>19</sup> Tierra y Libertad, 4 July 1931, 7 October 1932; Solidaridad Obrera, 30 July, 21-23, 29 October, 20-27 December 1932, 1, 8 January, 30 September 1933, 14 March, 5 April 1936; La Batalla, 1 September, 27 October 1932, 8 January, 8, 19, 24 February, 27 April 1933; Adelante, 28 October 1933; La Revista Blanca, 6 July 1934; Tuñón de Lara, El movimiento obrero, p.824

<sup>20</sup> Adelante, 10 January 1934; Solidaridad Obrera, 27 February, 3-28 March, 1, 9 April, 30 June, 4 July 1931, 22 March, 26 July, 25 December 1932, 9 April 1933

class', was also a continual threat for adult proletarians, a danger which one Barcelona worker who lived through the 1930s likened to the AIDS virus today.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the Republic the workers' lives were also under greater threat from the deadly housing stock in Barcelona than the pistols of 'evil people'. According to Tierra y Libertad, 50% of accommodation in the Catalan capital infringed 'the most elemental norms of safety'. The figure was even greater in the Barri xino, where workers of all ages were cut down by disease in overcrowded tenements. One Republican source attributed nearly 80% of all deaths in some of the Barri xino tenements to poor housing stock. Meanwhile, like so many other initiatives of the Catalan authorities, the planned slum clearance of the Barri xino under the 'Macià Plan' floundered on budgetary problems.<sup>22</sup>

The absence of radical housing reform during the Republic meant that the 'shanties' survived, with all their attendant health dangers. In Montjuïc, two young children were crushed to death when the wall of the shanty collapsed after heavy rainfall. When the authorities did act against the problem of the 'shanties', they resorted to a primitive slum clearance which only aggravated social problems and augmented the swollen army of homeless that had expanded vertiginously because of both the recession and the support of the authorities for the landlords in the 1931 rent strike. Since then, the landlords had continued to enjoy official protection to punish tenants. In the ghettos, where the rate of evictions was constant throughout the Republic, the callousness of the landlords was revealed by the eviction of sick workers, whether single or with families. There were even instances of the sick being evicted from flats in bed. The increasingly confident landlord class established itself as the veritable scourge of the unemployed, maintaining detailed blacklists of former rent strikers and those tenants who had been evicted for rent arrears due to either joblessness or illness. Meanwhile, the acceptance of homelessness by the Republican authorities can be seen from the fact that the estimated

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<sup>21</sup> L'Opinió, 30 September 1933; Claramunt i Furest, La Lluita, pp.193, 200-209, 215-216, 219-229; Solidaridad Obrera, 23 July 1931; Boletín Oficial del Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión, 67, February 1936, pp.43-58, 183-184; Aiguader i Miró, El problema, p.6; El Luchador, 5 June 1931; Tiempos Nuevos, 28 February 1935; Alba and Casasús, Diàlegs, p.15

<sup>22</sup> Tierra y Libertad, 2 August 1935; Claramunt i Furest, Problemes, p.18; Solidaridad Obrera, 9 April 1933, 20 March 1934; Guerra di Classe, 17 October 1936

30,000 *Barcelonins* who were either homeless, living in shanties or in short-term accommodation was lower than the number of unoccupied flats in the Catalan capital, of which there were approximately 40,000 in July 1936.<sup>23</sup>

In the proletarian moral economy, the fate of the homeless was far more emotive than the sufferings of the victims of illegality. The life chances of the homeless were severely curtailed on the streets and the 'order' of proletarian neighbourhoods was frequently broken as the homeless collapsed and died of illnesses such as diphtheria, pneumonia, tuberculosis, anaemia and consumption. This was the extreme point of a wider problem of unemployed *Barcelonins* who died through malnutrition and starvation in what the anarchists viewed as the 'society of death'. Underlining the gulf between the Republican hierarchy and the most impoverished *Barcelonins*, while the Catalan political élite attended a lavish banquet to celebrate the third anniversary of the birth of the Republic, an unemployed worker collapsed with malnutrition and died in the streets of Sant Andreu.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, many of those unemployed described by *La Colmena Obrera* as 'deprived of the right to life', turned to the 'final salvation' of suicide as a means of accelerating their inevitable expiration. These deaths were often accompanied by bitter notes that attacked the inhumanity of the world and what one suicide case described as the 'irresponsibility' of the Republican authorities towards the jobless.<sup>25</sup>

Nor was the unrelenting tragedy of proletarian existence could not be ameliorated in the crisis-ridden hospitals of Republican Barcelona. In Hospital Clinic, the main medical centre available to Barcelona workers was dreadfully overcrowded, with up to 30 beds in its poorly ventilated wards. Amid widespread allegations of corruption by the hospital administration, there were numerous high profile cases of workers going

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<sup>23</sup> *Adelante*, 7 January 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 January, 26 July 1932, 20 April, 8 June, 7 July 1933, 4 July 1936; *L'Opinió*, 30 September 1933; *Iniciales*, January 1934; *La Batalla*, 5 May 1932; *Las Noticias*, 2 January 1936; COPUB, *Memoria...de 1935*, pp.49, 488; *Tierra y Libertad*, 30 August 1934, 18 November 1932

<sup>24</sup> *Las Noticias*, 17 November, 8 December 1931; *L'Opinió*, 17 December 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 August, 4 September 1932, 10 February, 16, 18 August 1933, 14 April, 8 July, 4 August 1934, 3 December 1935; *El Luchador*, 3, 10 March 1933; *La Batalla*, 5 January 1933; *Adelante*, 17 February 1934. 'The Society of Death' is the title of the first chapter in José Prat, *La sociedad burguesa*, Barcelona, 1934

<sup>25</sup> *La Colmena Obrera*, 30 October 1931; *L'Opinió*, 19 August 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 8 December 1931, 21 February 1933; *Las Noticias*, 3, 11-12, 16, 28 January 1936; *Comuniqués from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet*, 1 April 1936 (AHLL); *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 July 1934

without important medicines and dying while awaiting treatment. Moreover, the authorities introduced no channels for complaints against a dismal, unsupervised health service. Despite the legislation separating Church from state, the hospitals of Barcelona remained under the grip of the clergy, largely because the authorities lacked the resources to run hospitals without the voluntary services of the religious orders. As in the monarchy, untrained nuns were often the front-line of care in the poorest of Barcelona's hospitals, where religious dogma took precedence over the general interests of the patients. Confrontational nuns in Hospital Clinic hit an 11-year old boy for reading Solidaridad Obrera, warning him that anarchist ideas were the cause of his illness. If atheist workers refused to pray they were sometimes expelled from hospitals, irrespective of their condition. One non-believer who collapsed in the street after being prematurely 'released' by nuns was refused re-admission to hospital. Meanwhile, a *cenetista* in a delicate 'post-op' condition had to be moved to the clinic in the Model jail after he was boycotted by nuns who refused to nurse him.<sup>26</sup>

The irresponsibility of the authorities and their disregard for citizens was vividly seen in l'Hospitalet, where two years after the outbreak of bubonic plague the public health situation was aggravated by municipal fraud. According to local Republicans, l'Hospitalet remained 'at the mercy of rats'. Meanwhile, an apocalyptic description of a local *cenetista* testified to 'a pestilent cloud, capable of killing' hanging over a city where 'dead dogs, cats and rats float in the boggy waters' and where the streets are 'the breeding-ground of death. Here there are no authorities, nor even a health body'. Despite the thousands of unemployed builders in l'Hospitalet, the city retained its primitive drainage system, as well as its abysmal water and electricity supply. For all the alarm about armed robbery, police reports in l'Hospitalet revealed that the greatest dangers to the person in the street came from irascible stray dogs.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 11 April 1931, 19, 29 March, 2 April, 24 May, 16, 25 June, 22 September 1932, 15 March, 6, 16, 19, 26 August, 22 September 1933, 20 January, 27 March 1935

<sup>27</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 16 August 1933; Marín, 'Una primera aproximació a la vida quotidiana dels Hospitalencs', p.30; Comunicués from the Guàrdia Urbana to the Mayor of l'Hospitalet, 1931-1936 (AHLL)

Despite the concerns of the Republicans for the citizenry or the Christian interest of La Vanguardia and La Veu de Catalunya in the sanctity of human existence, the lives of proletarians in Republican Barcelona remained cheap. This was underlined by both low wage rates and in the deadly way in which employers continued to cut corners on safety in the workplace. Working conditions in Catalan factories and building sites, particularly in the capital, remained abysmal and Barcelona city retained its infamous place at the head of the league table of industrial accidents. Not only did the authorities fail to fulfil their promise to make the bourgeoisie comply with the safety legislation but, because of the drive of employers to offset the falling rate of profit in the recession years, safety standards were relaxed even more and industrial accidents in Barcelona grew by one-third during the Republic. This meant that rather than be obsessed by the dangers of being the victim of illegality, workers would have been most timorous of what Solidaridad Obrera termed the danger of being 'mutilated by capitalist economic life'. After the burial of three workers killed in a factory explosion in Badalona, Solidaridad Obrera summed up the lot of 'the eternal victims of the capitalist machine' and concluded that 'when they [i.e. the capitalists and the authorities] are not leaving us hungry, busy jailing or cowardly murdering us, we run the constant danger of dying violently in the workplace'.<sup>28</sup> That negligent employers were never charged with manslaughter could not have been ignored by the collective conscience of the Barcelona proletariat. In turn, this must have reinforced the anarchist affirmation that the security forces were not motivated by the seriousness of the crime and that the gravest dangers facing the proletariat did not even register as 'crimes' in the bourgeois criminal code.

The proletarian moral economy formed around the experience of oppression also led to a rejection of the legitimacy of the sources of the 'respectable fears'. Since the eruption of social and industrial conflict in Catalonia after World War One, the privately owned press that reiterated the tales of the 'criminal danger' was popularly seen as the 'mercenary press', intimately tied to narrow economic interests and the object of contempt for the bulk of the proletariat. Despite the veneer of autonomy and diversity,

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<sup>28</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 17 June, 24 December 1931, 4 August 1934, 24 June 1936; Tiempos Nuevos, 28 February 1935; Soto Carmona, El trabajo, pp.659-663; La Colmena Obrera, 9 January 1932



all the apparently 'independent' newspapers in the Catalan capital were controlled by capitalist economic interests. Pich i Pon owned El Día Gráfico and La Noche, two minor Barcelona dailies, while La Vanguardia was the property of the Godó clan, one the city's leading textile families. Similarly, La Veu de Catalunya was the political organ of the Lliga and an important mouthpiece of the political interests of Catalan big business. It was commonly accepted that these associations exerted a direct impact on newspaper content and undermined free press principles of editorial independence. This was fertile ground for anarchist allegations that the bourgeois press was 'the great prostitute of existing civilisation' staffed by 'hack' journalists 'on hire' to 'financial cliques'.<sup>29</sup>

The view of social reality propagated in the bourgeois press was completely discordant with the experiences of the majority of workers. For instance, industrial accidents were portrayed as if they were natural occurrences or passing imperfections of the industrial system. More often than not, however, they were under-reported. La Vanguardia and La Veu de Catalunya concentrated exclusively on the loss of human life caused by what they suggested was the genocide that accompanied armed robbery, while remaining conspicuously silent about fatalities in workplace accidents. The same papers ignored the deaths of the jobless in the streets. The highly selective criterion employed by the conservative press to assess which deaths were newsworthy had nothing to do with the overall death toll, because the fatalities alone among the homeless in the 1930s far exceeded the numbers of policemen and security guards who died in armed robberies. This same selectivity was extended to the numerous cases of jobless workers who committed the heresy of *felo de se*, whose plight was hypocritically ignored by the bourgeois-catholic press.

The bourgeois press similarly alienated workers through its systematic and vocal defence of the economic oligarchy and its unmitigated hostility towards labour organisations. In the early 1920s the partialities of the bourgeois press had led CNT printers to impose 'red censorship' on many Barcelona dailies. This threat was renewed in the 1930s to counter bourgeois allegations against the 'criminal FAI'. As far as class-

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<sup>29</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 14 July 1932; Tierra y Libertad, 27 April 1934

conscious workers were concerned, the deceitful traditions of the bourgeois press made it easy for them to reject the stories of 'anarchist robbers' as the latest infamy directed against those who dared defend working class interests. In some cases petitions signed by hundreds of workers were sent to newspaper editors in opposition to the denunciations of 'anarcho-banditry'. The visceral scepticism of the local proletariat was skilfully encouraged by the anarchists, who reminded workers how the heroes of the international anarchist movement like Jules Bonnot and Nestor Makhno were widely regarded as 'bandits' in the bourgeois press. Meanwhile, Solidaridad Obrera likened the denigration of the FAI by the Barcelona press to the insults hurled on Spartacus and his slave army by the crumbling Roman Empire.<sup>30</sup>

The Republican newspapers were also regarded with great scepticism by Barcelona workers. While La Publicitat laid claim to a liberal-Republican tradition from the nineteenth century, when it embraced the cause of Émile Zola and the radical French intelligentsia during the 'Dreyfus Affair', the journalistic independence of the paper was interrupted during World War One with the take-over of the Tayá brothers, two freight entrepreneurs and vehement opponents of trade union rights who made their fortunes supplying the Allied war machine. Thereafter, amid widespread speculation that the paper was funded by the British Consulate in Barcelona, La Publicitat became an energetic defender of the cause of Anglo-French imperialism. Meanwhile, L'Opinió and L'Humanitat, both of which were emblematic of the 'critical' titles that emerged around the Republican movement during the late 1920s, were, by the mid-1930s, closely identified with ruling factions inside the Generalitat. In practice, both papers were little more than *fora* for the respective political careers of Lluhi i Vallescá and Companys. Equally, by the 1930s, La Publicitat was effectively the organ of the ACR. In terms of their content, while these titles covered a wide range of the political spectrum, they all advanced a view of social reality which, either covertly or overtly, clashed with the experiences of workers. Even in the nominally laic Republican press, suicides were given

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<sup>30</sup> Paz, Durruti, p.260; Solidaridad Obrera, 20 June, 1 August 1933, 18, 24 April, 2 August 1934; El Matí, 6 September 1935

cursory, uncritical coverage, as if they were natural occurrences, unconnected with unemployment and the depravation that characterised the lot of the jobless.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike the advocates of the 'moral panics', the 'expropriators' were, broadly speaking, inside the 'moral economy' of large sectors of the proletariat. The low wage economy of the Catalan capital fostered an illegalist tradition that accepted the need to 'steal to survive' and validated pilfering from the workplace. Such practices were embodied in the popular aphorism 'Whoever robs a thief has a hundred years pardon' ('Quien roba a un ladrón tiene cien años de perdón'). Indicative of the wider legitimacy of the 'expropriators', the novelist Pio Baroja visited a number of jailed *faístas* awaiting trial on robbery charges. The allure of the 'expropriators' within proletarian communities can be explained insofar as their activities largely affected distant capitalist institutions such as banks and insurance companies. Meanwhile, even when the exponents of armed illegality did operate inside proletarian neighbourhoods, they selected targets socially removed from the working class and on the other side of the fault line that separated the proletariat from the commercial middle classes. In these circumstances workers were highly unlikely to condemn armed robberies aimed at shopkeepers and rent and debt collectors, all of whom were regarded with immense disdain within the proletarian 'moral economy'. Equally, since he was a shopkeeper and Councillor heavily implicated in municipal corruption, the assassination of Gil i Gil for non-payment of 'revolutionary tax' to a FAI *grupo* did not arouse much sympathy among the workers of l'Hospitalet. Similarly, the policemen, night-watchmen and private security guards who attempted to resist the 'expropriators' were widely regarded by workers as the guarantors of bourgeois privilege, who did nothing to protect workers from the dangers of the workplace.<sup>32</sup>

Benefiting from the residual anti-police traditions of the proletariat, it is noticeable that the 'expropriation' squads and the unemployed illegalists enjoyed much freedom of operation in the ghettos. Illegality, therefore, reflected the zonal segregation

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<sup>31</sup> Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.1, p.69; Fernández Urbina, 'Los "affaires" Straperlo y Tayá', pp.18-33; *La Publicitat*, 28 January 1932; *Las Noticias*, 3, 11-12, 16, 28 January 1936

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Humphries, 'Steal to Survive: The Social Crime of Working Class Children, 1890-1940', *Oral History*, 9, 1, 1981, pp.24-33; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9 January, 30 July 1932, 15 February 1933; *La Publicitat*, 9 January 1932, 7 September 1935; Liarte, *El camino*, p.201; *Tierra y Libertad*, 17 October 1931

of classes in urban Barcelona. For instance, the calls of the authorities for a 'civic reaction' from the 'honourable citizenry' of Barcelona to apprehend 'expropriators' only found an echo in the more economically stable districts of the city such as the Eixample and Sarrià, where the largely middle class and bourgeois populace occasionally formed irate mobs of citizens that set off in pursuit of robbers. Meanwhile, indicating that the illegality that worried the authorities was of little concern to workers, the same call went largely unheard in the ghettos, where community solidarity and a generalised identification with the underdog meant that illegality was seen either with tacit sympathy or, at least, with indifference. There is, moreover, evidence that in the marginal ghettos the teams of 'expropriators' were viewed in a positive light, as they symbolised the strength of resistance of the proletarian community and were proof that 'they' (the authorities) could be confronted.<sup>33</sup>

### **7.3. 'Revolutionary Constructivism': the End of the 'Expropriations' ?**

The irrefrangible sectarianism of the Barcelona CNT-FAI leadership ensured that the élitism inherent to the 'revolutionary gymnastics', and the assumption that anarchist forces alone were sufficient to make the revolution, remained unaltered by the post-December 1933 repression. The rejection of other revolutionary factions by the *grupos* led the Barcelona Confederation to become increasingly ghettoised throughout 1934. This was accentuated by the unyielding repression directed against the Catalan CNT by the Generalitat. Because this campaign of harassment was disproportionate to the barriers placed in front of other workers' groups in Catalonia and the other CNT Regional Federations elsewhere in the Spanish state, the Catalan CNT developed something of a persecution complex. The isolation of the Catalan CNT was most apparent from its refusal to enter the Workers' Alliance, the BOC-inspired anti-fascist workers' front, that included socialists, dissident communists and *treintistas*. Outside of

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<sup>33</sup> La Vanguardia, 31 March 1934, 11 August 1935; García Oliver, El eco, p.616; Porcel, La revuelta, pp.118-121. Revealingly, the only cases I have found where workers were prepared to pursue expropriators occurred during pay-roll heists.

Catalonia, the Workers' Alliance also included a number of CNT Regional Federations, most notably in Asturias, which eschewed the sectarian line of the Catalan anarchists.<sup>34</sup>

The Catalan Workers' Alliance took the initiative in the campaign against authoritarianism in 1934, attacking local fascist groups and pressurising the Generalitat to respond to the offensive of the Madrid government against the Autonomy Statute.<sup>35</sup> As the year wore on, the Radical government which had ruled in Madrid since the November 1933 elections became increasingly untenable, raising the possibility that a new government might be formed with ministers from the quasi-fascist CEDA. It seemed to many on the left that the CEDA was on the brink of peacefully taking power and converting the Republic into a corporate, Catholic state. However, the élitist CNT leadership in Barcelona could not see the wood for the trees and continued to hinder the work of the anti-fascist alliance in Catalonia, expounding that a government led by the CEDA could make little difference to the 'Republican fascism' that was established in 1931.<sup>36</sup>

The introspection of the Barcelona anarchist leadership must have been of enormous solace to the Spanish right, because the boycott of the anti-fascist alliance by the largest single proletarian organisation in Catalonia meant that the Workers' Alliance, like its predecessor, the Workers' Alliance Against Unemployment, was effectively doomed to failure. Nevertheless, with or without the Catalan CNT, the supporters of the Workers' Alliance were determined to act, because the price of inactivity would have been the accession to power of the CEDA. This culminated in the mobilisation of the Workers' Alliances throughout Spain in October 1934 to counter an expected fascist take-over of government. The October events were crowned by the Asturian Revolution,

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<sup>34</sup> Víctor Alba, *La Alianza Obrera. Historia y análisis de una táctica de unidad*, Madrid, 1978, pp.191-200; Angeles Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo y anarcosindicalismo en Asturias (1890-1936)*, Madrid, 1988, pp.390-409; David Ruiz, *Insurrección defensiva y revolución obrera: el octubre español de 1934*, Barcelona, 1988, pp.59-102; José Manuel Macarro Vera, 'La autovaloración anarquista: un principio de análisis y acción. Sevilla, 1931-1936', *Estudios de Historia Social*, 31, 1984, pp.135-149; *Adelante*, 5 January-9 March 1934; Peirats, *La CNT*, vol.1, pp.82-88; *La Revista Blanca*, 3 January-16 November 1934; *La Batalla*, 5 May, 16 June 1934

<sup>35</sup> *La Batalla*, January-October 1934; Jordi de Camps i Arboix, *Història de la llei de contractes de conreu*, Barcelona, 1971

<sup>36</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 16 February-11 October 1934; *Solidaridad*, 13 February-3 May 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 February-19 September 1934; *Sindicalismo*, 4 April 1934

the largest revolutionary outburst in Europe since the 1871 Paris Commune, in which the united Asturian proletariat took control of the means of production and held the army at bay for two weeks.<sup>37</sup>

In stark contrast to the heroic contribution of the Asturian CNT to the Workers' Alliance, the Catalan CNT-FAI leadership was completely overtaken by the march of events and remained aloof from the October mobilisation. In Barcelona, the BOC managed to muster its forces and successfully imposed the first ever general strike in the Catalan capital against the will of the anarchists, however, the CNT-FAI countermanded the strike order of its rivals in the Workers' Alliance. Most ignominious of all was the decision of the 'Nosotros'-dominated CNT Regional Committee to broadcast a call to the Barcelona proletariat to return to work on military radio while the insurgents in Asturias were struggling to hold off the Spanish army.<sup>38</sup>

In the aftermath of October, the repression was ferocious. There were 40,000 workers jailed throughout Spain, the autonomous powers of the Generalitat were rescinded and the power of the right-wing Madrid government was bolstered as constitutional guarantees were abrogated under the *Ley de orden público*. According to the British Ambassador in Madrid, Spain presented:

'the impression of a country under a dictatorship...The prisons are overflowing and provisional ones have to be found to contain the enormous number of people who have been arrested. The arrests often take place without any proof and only on suspicion of complicity in the rising...Catalonia is under military control and no vestige of popular representation remains'.

The opportunistic Radicals seemed dangerously close to allowing the quasi-fascist CEDA the chance to form a majority government in Madrid. In the syndical terrain, the right threatened even the most basic trade union rights and all independent syndical organisations, whether UGT, CNT or autonomous, were effectively proscribed. With the

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<sup>37</sup> For the Asturian events see Narcis Molins i Fabregas, *UHP. La revolució proletari d'Asturies*, Barcelona, 1935; 'Ignotus' (Manuel Villar), *El anarquismo en la insurrección de Asturias (La CNT y la FAI en octubre de 1934)*, Valencia, 1935; Manuel Grossi Mier, *La insurrección de Asturias*, (2nd edition) Madrid, 1978.

<sup>38</sup> Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, pp.258-259; Peirats, *Figuras*, pp.262-263; CNT, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza 1936*, Bilbao, 1978, pp.154-168

diminution of syndical power employers slashed wages and set about victimising thousands of working class militants. Again, the British Ambassador summed up the new favourable business climate, reporting that:

'the popular masses are likely to be in a state of sullen disaffection but at the mercy of the government for some time...Employers if all kinds, however, seem to view the immediate future with cheerfulness on account of the powerless condition to which labour organisations have been reduced'.<sup>39</sup>

The Catalan bourgeoisie also welcomed the rightward drift in the political landscape after October. Showing the limits of the *Catalanisme* of the propertied classes, the representative organisations of the industrial and agrarian wings of the Catalan economic oligarchy - the Institut Agrícola Català de Sant Isidre and the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional - invited the pseudo-fascistic CEDA leader Gil Robles to visit Barcelona, where they feted this confirmed centralist. The political project of the Catalan bourgeoisie was now transparently authoritarian. Bourgeois groups called for the death penalty to be used against those who attempted to 'destroy Catalan wealth' and the indefinite continuation of martial law to remove 'the black stain' of social protest 'from our beloved Barcelona'. In an alarming search for models of social control, La Vanguardia heaped accolades on 'the new Germany' which, in under two years had banished all signs of strikes and lock-outs. Meanwhile, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional made a public call for Anguera de Sojo, by now a member of the semi-fascist CEDA, to return to Barcelona and pick up the reins of power.<sup>40</sup>

This post-October context prompted growing concern inside the Spanish CNT-FAI that the movement was becoming peripheral to the march of socio-political developments which day-by-day pointed towards confrontation. The sense of alarm was also evident in the traditional Catalan bastion of the CNT-FAI, where voices spoke out in favour of a new line that could allow the Confederation to break out of the repressive

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<sup>39</sup> FO371/18597/W9526/27/41, FO371/18597/W10704/27/41 and FO371/18599/W9522/325/41: Reports from Sir G. Grahame, 25 October and 6 December 1934 (PRO); Ricard Vinyes i Ribes, 'Sis d'octubre, repressió i represaliats', L'Avenc, 30, 1980, p.52

<sup>40</sup> La Vanguardia, 9-27 October, 4 November 1934; Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, Memoria...de 1934, pp.5-8, 215, 218-231

circle in which it was trapped. Indeed, the CNT was veritably buckling under the white heat of a repression that palpably exceeded all that which had been experienced since the beginning of the Republican period. The Barcelona Builders' Union reported that the sheer weight of the repression had produced a dominant mood of 'apathy' in its ranks.<sup>41</sup>

Many anarchists now accepted that the political situation had drastically deteriorated since 1931, particularly with the return of the death penalty, a measure which Solidaridad Obrera denounced as 'a step backwards that suppresses one of the most important human conquests'. Amid bitter internal polemics, the Catalan CNT-FAI leadership accepted the need to break with the élitist sectarianism of 'revolutionary gymnastics' and make concessions to the growing aspiration for anti-fascist unity within the Catalan CNT rank-and-file. Even the FIJL, which had been one of the most sectarian components of the Catalan anarchist movement before the October rising, now spawned a pro-unity current in the wake of Asturias. A number of the contributors to La Revista Blanca underwent a similar conversion and its pages reflected the debate inside the CNT-FAI over the need for greater unity of action.<sup>42</sup>

The pressure for a change in line was bound up with a growing dissatisfaction with the 'Nosotros'. Despite the moral superiority enjoyed by 'Nosotros' in libertarian circles, this so-called 'super-FAI' showed tremendous disdain for democratic protocols and it was common for important decisions affecting the CNT-FAI to be resolved in assemblies of no more than six *grupos de afinidad*. On occasions none of the members of 'Nosotros' attended FAI assemblies but they still expected their initiatives to be followed, which they communicated through third parties. In keeping with its militarised nature, 'Nosotros' exerted a paternal influence over *faístas* through both its unrivalled popularity and its largely unaccountable power base in the Catalan Confederal Defence Committees, on which Francisco Ascaso, Jover, Durruti, García Oliver, Fernández, Sanz, Ortiz and 'Valencia' were all represented.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 10 November 1934

<sup>42</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 11 October 1934; La Batalla, 13 September 1935; La Revista Blanca, 26 April-31 May, 14 June-19 July 1935

<sup>43</sup> García Oliver, El eco, p.172



Throughout 1934 the reaction to the autocratic control exerted by 'Nosotros' over the other anarchist *grupos de afinidad* gathered pace. In July 1934 Peirats, the secretary of the Barcelona FAI, resigned from the organisation in protest at the influence of 'Nosotros'. In the months after the Asturian Revolution this gesture was followed by several other anarchist *grupos* who left the FAI in disgust at both the machinations of the 'Nosotros' group within the Barcelona CNT-FAI and in dismay at the woeful consequences of the 'revolutionary gymnastics'. Inside the FAI, Francisco Ascaso and Sanz, both of whom had issued orders to the Catalan CNT-FAI in October, faced harsh criticism of their decision to order a return to work. There were even calls from the 'A' *grupo de afinidad* of Toryho and Peirats for the expulsion of 'Nosotros'. This was matched with renewed demands for the introduction of grass-roots democracy in the FAI.<sup>44</sup>

Although 'Nosotros' continued to enjoy mythical status among *faístas*, the challenge to the 'anarcho-Bolshevik' line of 'revolutionary gymnastics' was gathering pace. In a curious twist, the rise of the 'Nervio' *grupo de afinidad* of Abad de Santillán, the intellectual parent of trabazón and the projected fusion of a specifically anarchist organisation with anarcho-sindicalist unions, which heralded the relative decline in influence of 'Nosotros' and the end of 'revolutionary gymnastics' in the CNT. This shift was underlined by the choice of Ildefonso González as the successor to Peirats as secretary of the Barcelona FAI. An Argentinian émigré and ex-FORA activist, González regularly collaborated with Abad de Santillán inside 'Nervio'. The ascendancy of 'Nervio' was finally sealed by the arrival of Abad de Santillán as editor of Tierra y Libertad, Tiempos Nuevos and Timón, while Villar, another leading member of the group, became editor at Solidaridad Obrera.<sup>45</sup>

From the end of 1934 until the outbreak of Civil War in 1936, 'Nervio', and Abad de Santillán in particular, spearheaded a new concern for organisation within the CNT-FAI. This presaged an important shift within the Catalan CNT-FAI and the recuperation of a 'constructive' concept of the revolution that had largely been banished from the

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<sup>44</sup> Gutiérrez Molina, La Idea, p. 77

<sup>45</sup> Miró, Cataluña, pp. 48-49, 51, 54, 61-62

Confederation since the departure of the moderate anarcho-syndicalists during 1932-1933. The conception of social transformation enunciated by Abad de Santillán was premised on a disciplined, organised, industrial-based transition towards a classless, stateless society, far removed from the ruralist, anti-modernist, commune-based ideals of Puente and Urales that had influenced sectors of the FAI in earlier years. Similarly, Abad de Santillán exposed the weaknesses of the chaotic guerrilla actions of the *grupos* that brought, in his view, little more than 'the sacrifice of valuable lives in precipitate actions'. Instead, he advanced the tactical view that the revolution 'was not just a question of force, audacity, and fearlessness, but the ripe fruit of the conscious participation of the majority of the people in the solution of their problems'.<sup>46</sup>

The manifest similarities between the perspectives of Abad de Santillán and the 'constructivist' conception of the revolution of the *treintistas* opened up the possibility of a rapprochement between the FAI-dominated CNT and those anarcho-syndicalists who had been outside the Confederation since the split of 1932-1933. This complemented the rank-and-file sentiments in favour of proletarian unity that had flourished after Asturias. After October 1934 many of the *treintistas* had revealed an interest in returning to their 'libertarian home'. Abad de Santillán did everything within his power to make this homecoming a reality, particularly as he, like many other Catalan anarchists, increasingly regarded the breach between *faísta* and *treintista* as absurd. Moreover, because its ideas were firmly rooted in anarchist orthodoxy, the 'Nervio' group was in a perfect position to achieve the re-unification of the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists in the CNT, calming the hostility of many *faístas* towards the *treintistas*, including even the most militant elements of the FIJL and the all-important Catalan FAI, much to the chagrin of the 'Nosotros' group, whose élitist, maximalist line was increasingly discarded.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For the ideas of Diego Abad de Santillán see the collection of his writings edited by Antonio Elorza, *El anarquismo y la revolución en España. Escritos, 1930-1938*, Madrid, 1976, *passim.*, Diego Abad de Santillán, *El organismo económico de la revolución*, (2nd edition) Madrid, 1978, and the critical study, 'Diego Abad de Santillán: Un anarquismo sin adjetivos. Una visión crítica y actual de la revolución social', *Anthropos*, 138, 1992.

<sup>47</sup> *Tierra y Libertad*, 24 December 1935; Preface by Pere Gabriel to Joan Peiró, *Perill a la reraguarda*, (2nd edition) Mataró, 1987, p.8; *Sindicalismo*, 30 May, 7 August 1935; *La Batalla*, 19 July 1935; Abad de Santillán, *El organismo*, p.8; Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, pp.175, 186, 202-203; García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.123-124, 185-188, 336-338, 507-508

The passionate calls for a rupture with the insurrectionary line of 1932-1933 carried with them a rejection of the tactic of 'expropriation'. The balance finally shifted away from the proponents of 'expropriation' with the ascendancy of 'Nervio' within the CNT-FAI. The anti-illegalist stance of the 'Nervio' group developed in the 1920s in Buenos Aires where, from the pages of La Protesta, Abad de Santillán and his close ally, López Arango, combated the 'anarcho-banditry' of the growing numbers of Italo-Argentinian individualists who were inspired by Di Giovanni and Scarfó. The campaign of La Protesta also coincided with the arrival of Durruti, Francisco Ascaso and Jover in the American sub-continent. When the Iberians left a trail of empty banks in their wake, they too incurred the scorn of the *protestistas*, who damned them for undermining the reputation of anarchism as a revolutionary creed. While Abad de Santillán largely overcame his tactical differences with Durruti, his hostility towards the individualists and their violence was sealed after López Arango was assassinated by Di Giovanni. It was no surprise then, that Abad de Santillán viewed 'crime' as the 'fruit of misery and desperation', 'a badly directed act of rebellion that does not follow an overall revolutionary plan and was, therefore, worthy of reproach'. Although the 'constructivists' admitted feeling 'compassion' for those who were forced to steal, they emphasised that 'robbery' was unacceptable for the 'conscious anarchist' because, in the 'immense majority of cases', such behaviour was incompatible with the 'universal, total expropriation' and the levelling labour of social revolution.<sup>48</sup>

The desire to curb the 'expropriations' became irresistible in the face of growing fascist reaction. As Civera had noted with considerable prescience in 1932, illegality was a potent agent of social disintegration that could be exploited by the authoritarian right.<sup>49</sup> Equally, the marginalisation of the proponents of armed illegality was a vital precondition for the re-unification of the CNT and the return of the moderate anarcho-syndicalists. As we have seen, the *treintistas* were priggish to the point of prudery on the question of illegality. At the height of the campaign of bourgeois-Republican 'moral

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<sup>48</sup> Bayer, Anarchism, *passim*.; Joan Llarch, La muerte, pp.57-59; Various, 'Diego Abad de Santillán: Un anarquismo sin adjetivos', p.12, 30, 38; Nervio, July 1934; Solidaridad Obrera, 23 September 1932

<sup>49</sup> Orto, May 1932

panics', Peiró lamented the hegemony of those in the FAI whose 'Al Capone-style' conception of the revolution had transformed the CNT unions into the 'receptacle and lid for common criminals'. Behind the propaganda, Peiró developed a critique of illegality that had much in common with that of Abad de Santillán and the *treintista* activists maintained that 'robbery' and revolution were incompatible because 'criminals can never be revolutionaries'. Similarly, Peiró forewarned that the egoistic activities of Stirnerist illegalists might become a disruptive force for the revolution, leading to actions devoid of socio-political content that would dishonour the anarchist message and weaken the moral standing of revolutionaries. This was matched with fears that the reliance on armed fund-raising tactics could corrupt militants and encourage activists to expropriate for their own ends.<sup>50</sup>

While the strategy of armed fund-raising had never enjoyed universal acceptance among 'the libertarian family' of Barcelona, public disapproval from the anarchist ranks was always muted by the *suprema lex* of the movement: the intense class and organisational solidarity established in the dark years of the 1920s. Nevertheless, the ascendancy of the 'Nervio' group accompanied growing pressure for an end to the expropriations. At the June 1934 Plenum of CNT Regional Committees, the IWA, the anarcho-syndicalist international, had already voiced its displeasure with the 'expropriation' tactic. The IWA delegate's additional request that the CNT stabilise the internal functioning of its unions revealed a certain ignorance of the intensity of the Generalitat repression.<sup>51</sup>

No less important was the fact that for all the richness of the proletarian 'moral economy' and the enduring relationship between the FAI and its social constituency, the enthusiasm for armed fund-raising tactics among many of its one-time supporters in the CNT-FAI was waning. This was owed to a variety of factors.

Firstly, while *Solidaridad Obrera* doggedly stuck to the line that neither *cenetistas* nor *faistas* participated in acts of armed illegality on behalf of the

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<sup>50</sup> *Sindicalismo*, 10 November 1933; *L'Opinió*, 18 August 1934; Peiró, *Perill*, pp.xvii-xviii, xxiii; Manent i Pesas, *Records*, pp.178-184; Pestaña, *Lo que aprendí*, vol.2, *passim.*; de Lera, *Pestaña*, pp.205-206

<sup>51</sup> *Tiempos Nuevos*, 18 April 1935; Pestaña, *Terrorismo*, pp.100-102; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 June 1934

organisation, it was evident that the constant need of the CNT-FAI leadership to issue periodic denials was becoming tiresome. Durruti and Francisco Ascaso saw the need to respond publicly to accusations in El Sol, the Madrid Republican daily, that they were 'professional robbers', with Durruti explaining the preference of the FAI for the 'collective robbery' of social revolution. 'Marianet', the Barcelona Builders' Union leader, also entered the propaganda fray by attacking the 'defamation' against the libertarians by the bourgeois press. When the allegations ceased to abate, however, the Barcelona Builders' Union issued a manifesto refuting allegations that it collected 'revolutionary tax' from employers, because 'the Builders' Union does not employ threats with thuggery and intimidation as one of its norms'. Nevertheless, increasing energies were devoted to rebutting the claims of the 'mercenary press' and the counter-claims of the CNT-FAI press that some of the perpetrators of armed robberies held in police custody were the namesakes of Barcelona anarchist militants revealed a comical defensiveness. Growing fears inside the CNT-FAI that the 'expropriations' could damage the prestige of the Confederation were accompanied by signs of discomfort inside FAI ranks. These were underlined by a series of articles written by Jaume Balius, a young journalist who had gravitated towards anarchism from the fringes of radical *Catalaniste*. Following a relatively balanced dismissal of the stereotypes of anarchists as 'abnormal' and 'savage' as part of a drive by the authorities to tarnish the 'international culture' of the proletariat, Balius launched a bloodcurdling attack on Planes and Madrid, two of the journalists at the forefront of the press campaign. 'Your knowledge', Balius concluded, 'like your souls, is rubbish. In the midst of the social rubbish of which the bourgeoisie is riddled, your hearts are rubbish. Our day will come...[then] we will judge you'. On another occasion, Durruti personally went to the La Publicitat offices in search of Planes, vowing that when he found the 'shameless hack' (*desvergonzado plumifero*) he would 'knock his block off' (*romperle la crisma*) and 'do him in!' (*romperle el alma!*).<sup>52</sup>

A second reason for the change of heart of the erstwhile advocates of armed illegality was the concern that a tactic that had been primarily regarded as a short-term

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<sup>52</sup> Solidaridad Obrera, 9 November 1932, 28 January, 17 November 1933, 18, 26 April, 4, 14 July, 9, 14-18 August 1934; Tierra y Libertad, 8 December 1933; Paz, Durruti, p.311

expedient could bring discredit on the CNT-FAI. By 1934-1935 it was clear that there were numerous groups of 'expropriators' who were members of the CNT-FAI but yet operated outside the control of the Confederal Defence Committees. This was matched with a recognition in libertarian circles that the relatively unsupervised admission of *grupos de afinidad* into the FAI between 1931 and 1934 had allowed what José Luis Gutiérrez Molina described as adventurers 'attracted by violent action' and provocateurs to enter the movement. These qualms about the calibre of FAI recruits lent succour to allegations from both *treintistas* and *bloquistas* that a number of *grupos de afinidad* were 'out of control' and made up of 'irresponsibles' and 'confidants' who were prepared to attack and kill members of other workers' groups.<sup>53</sup>

An additional source of disquiet for the CNT-FAI leadership was the increasing evidence of impropriety among militants. Although the anarchists did not openly wash their dirty clothing in public, there was a steady rise in reports in the libertarian press that referred to the expulsion of *faístas* and *cenetistas* from the movement for 'immorality', a libertarian euphemism for the misappropriation of funds and the abuse of the solidarity which symbolised the hub of organisational life in the CNT-FAI. Matters worsened in early 1934 when Josep Esplugues was expelled from the Barcelona FAI for receiving money from the Lliga in return for pursuing the abstentionist line in the December 1933 elections. Meanwhile, seasoned activists like Eroles Batlle, a *grupista* and leading militant from the Barcelona textile sector, came under suspicion for embezzling CNT funds. Months later, Gilabert, another leading Barcelona *faísta* and one-time member of the *Solidaridad Obrera* editorial board, faced a lengthy investigation over corruption charges.<sup>54</sup>

The reservations of the CNT-FAI hierarchy also focused on the individualists and former activists like Piera who, after quitting the FAI, were blind to the appeal of collective organisation and robbed for purely individualistic ends. Other individualists,

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<sup>53</sup> Gutiérrez Molina, *La Idea*, pp.65, 77; *Sindicalismo*, 14, 21, 30 June 1933; *Tierra y Libertad*, 14 April 1933; *Adelante*, 7-9 November 1933

<sup>54</sup> 'Juanel' (Juan Manuel Molina), *Consideraciones sobre la posición de la CNT de España*, Buenos Aires, 1949, p.12; *La Publicitat*, 4-5 April 1934; *Tierra y Libertad*, 6 January, 13 October 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 7 July 1933, 3, 8, 19 July, 5, 23 August, 19, 27 September 1934

like Gardenyes, had been expelled from the CNT-FAI movement as they were deemed incapable of submitting themselves to the collective discipline required for organisations, even those of an anarchist ilk.<sup>55</sup> Even though the Stirnerist illegalists were often not *cenetistas* or *faistas*, as anarchists and part of the wider 'libertarian family', their antics brought growing embarrassment to the CNT-FAI leadership. This unease reached its apogee following a series of high-profile cases in which workers were killed during robberies perpetrated by the individualists. One Stirnerist 'union of egoists' killed a UGT waiter who refused to hand over the cash register in the café where he worked. Testifying to the bizarre alliances forged by the individualists, the gang included an anarchist printer who worked for the Catalan CNT Regional Committee at the Solidaridad Obrera print shop and Charles Levesey, an English bourgeois adventurer and the son of a factory owner. The sterility of individualist violence was witnessed again in December 1934 when Vicente Aranda Sánchez, a twenty-year old blacklisted anarchist linked to the individualists of Barcelona killed a young shop worker in badly bungled robbery.<sup>56</sup>

The Aranda affair brought armed illegality to the forefront of national politics and culminated in a death sentence for Aranda following his trial at a military court. For the Stirnerists who wrote for Iniciales, the fate of Aranda was a *cause célèbre* and they greeted his execution with a stinging attack on 'the Republic of jailers and hangmen'. Meanwhile, FAI, the influential clandestine paper of the Barcelona Local Federation of Anarchist Groups carried a long obituary for Aranda. This was combined with a lengthy treatise on the merits of 'expropriation' and illegality, in which FAI defended the right of the jobless 'to associate with other unemployed to conquer the right to live by force' because 'for the man stalked by hunger and privation the last remaining dignified option is robbery', a legitimate 'form of acquiring everyday food'. This certainly remained true for many of the poor of Barcelona and the series of 'expropriations' that occurred in the

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<sup>55</sup> L'Opinió, 31 March 1934; Solidaridad Obrera, 28 June 1931, 6 September 1934; La Batalla, 7 July 1932; Las Noticias, 5-6 May 1932; Porcel, La revuelta, pp.118-121

<sup>56</sup> Léon-Ignaci, Los años, p.314, La Vanguardia, 13, 17-18 August 1933; Las Noticias, 2 July 1936; Paz, Durruti, p.67; La Vanguardia, 30 June 1934; Las Noticias, 2 July 1936; Ealham, 'Crime and Punishment', pp.31-37; La Vanguardia, Las Noticias, La Veu de Catalunya, 18-22 December 1934

days following Aranda's execution would suggest that the *force majeure* of capital punishment failed to either intimidate the 'expropriators' or control illegality. Instead, the enduring practice of 'expropriations' was revealed by a police report published in the press in April 1935. Besides the illegality of the unemployed, the police observed that the 'shameful industry of robbery' had the 'enormous importance of nourishing the funds of the clandestine [CNT] unions, whose booty pays for assassinations, sabotage and new robberies, thereby nurturing and strengthening anarchy and social revolution'. The police also identified a stalemate situation whereby 'when a trial for robbery or an assassination occurs, immediately new robberies are committed', thereby constituting 'an established chain of punishable events and it is this continuity that it is vital to break'.<sup>57</sup>

This state of affairs confirmed the 'constructivist' axiom of Abad de Santillán that the obsession with spontaneous rebellion made some anarchists far too receptive to random violence and acts that were devoid of any constructive revolutionary content. Epitomising the random nature of individualist violence, the father of the shop worker killed by Aranda was a well-known Barcelona anarchist. Moreover, the embrace of illegality also brought the danger that if the 'expropriators' became completely isolated from the proletariat, they might become 'professional gunmen'. In some instances the decision to devote oneself to a life with the gun may have been a positive choice or the reflection of a pseudo-Nitzscheian desire to become the armed avenger of bourgeois injustices. In other cases, however, illegalism served as a self-justifying theory for any individual who had lost the habits of regular employment or, quite simply found it unpleasant, alongside which the excitement of life as an 'expropriator' seemed far preferable. By extension, the unregulated expansion of illegalism carried the possibility that 'common thieves' might use anarchism as a pretext for their own activities, dressing up their deviant actions as 'anarchic'. This trend had already been observed before the 1930s.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Iniciales*, November 1934; *FAI*, 8 January 1935; *La Vanguardia*, 22-25 December 1934, 30 April 1935

<sup>58</sup> Pérez Baró, *Els "Feliços" anys*, p.87



Lastly, the anarchist-individualist perspective on crime seriously overestimated the extent to which illegal acts could foster anti-capitalist struggle. The protest value of illegality was revealed to be severely limited and was never likely to generate a mass campaign capable of challenging the structures of capitalist society. Indeed, it was clear that the logic of Stirnerist individualism actually tended towards anti-worker activities.

All these factors combined to produce a consensus within the hierarchy of the Barcelona CNT-FAI that the exponents of 'individual expropriation' were incompatible with the wider struggle for collective revolutionary transformation. Emili Salut, a well-informed veteran of the struggles of these years, criticised the 'pernicious influence' of the individualists and the 'moral disorder' brought by their belief in 'complete amorality as a norm of life'. Similarly, 'Marianet' condemned the 'discredit' transmitted to the CNT-FAI by the Stirnerists, who he denounced as crypto-bourgeois parvenus, whose 'individual expropriations' were 'nothing more than the transferral of wealth from one set of hands to another, exclusively for personal benefit'. Rather than the source of liberation, the Builders' Union leader maintained that individualism ensured the continuation of the class system and the limited social mobility of the illegalists, who could use their new-found wealth to elevate themselves above the rest of the workers. Consequently, an 'abyss' separated the 'lost men' and individualists who turned their backs on the everyday struggles of the libertarian movement which, as 'Marianet' explained, were geared towards 'general, not individual well-being' and 'collective expropriation'. Meanwhile, in a flight of romanticism, Montseny lamented that many of the illegalists displayed little of 'the intrinsic honour of the pure bandit, the good highway robber [and] the traditional popular bandit, whose deep sense of justice led them to rob from the rich to give to the poor'. On a more pragmatic level, Montseny expressed her 'moral pain' at the association between anarchism and criminality. Finally, Germinal Esgleas, who had himself been very close to some of the Stirnerists, launched a stern attack on the 'mistaken policy' of his former individualist allies, whom he accused of 'confusing rebellion with terrorism'. Reiterating what he saw as true anarchist morality, Esgleas called for the need to 'attack' the individualists 'at root' within the Barcelona

libertarian movement, because their acts 'have nothing to do with anarchist doctrine', which aspires to 'the highest of human values', not 'professional banditry'.<sup>59</sup>

The decisive move of the opponents of armed illegality in the Barcelona CNT-FAI came early in the summer of 1935 at a clandestine plenum of the Local Federation of Anarchist Groups held in Carrer Escudellers, just across from the Barri xino. At this gathering a long discussion on the 'crime epidemic' culminated in an intervention by Durruti in which he advocated a break with the tactic of 'expropriations', whether for individual or for collective ends. Durruti's address explained that:

'the eruption of robberies is putting our movement in great danger. This danger does not stem from police repression and its consequences but, from the fact that the continuation of this trend will bring the decomposition of our organisation. This is of immense importance because the first thing that those who dedicate themselves to the industry of robbery do when they are caught by the police, is show their CNT card and call the Prisoners' Support Committee, thereby presenting the people with an inaccurate view of our objectives'.

Although Durruti had the full support of 'Nosotros', his speech was based on his own experience while interned without trial between October 1934 and spring 1935, during which he became aware that many of those detained for armed robbery made appeals for assistance from the Prisoners' Support Committee, even though they were often not members of the Confederal Defence Committees 'expropriation' teams. In some cases, Durruti believed that it was not even certain whether the claimants were *bona fide* CNT militants. Nevertheless, because they produced a CNT card, the detainees received support from the Prisoners' Support Committee.

The main opposition to the change of policy over 'expropriations' came from Ruano Segúndez, a *faísta* and Argentinian individualist who was also a close friend of Durruti. Ruano Segúndez pilloried what he saw as Durruti's hypocrisy and his attempt to deny others the right to adopt the very practices he had employed so enthusiastically in the 1920s in both Barcelona and South America. However, the individualist option was

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<sup>59</sup> *Salut*, *Viveres*, pp.81-82; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 August 1933, 26 April, 14 July 1934; *La Revista Blanca*, 4 January, 10 May 1935

rejected by the majority of *faístas* and, as occurred so often during the Republic, the views of 'Nosotros' prevailed.<sup>60</sup>

The resolution of the FAI did not mean that there would be an immediate cessation of armed illegality. Firstly, the rejection of 'expropriation' was qualified by the 'individual' prefix. This clearly allowed the possibility that the Confederal Defence Committees might return to commit 'expropriations' to fund the CNT-FAI as and when the need arose. Secondly, as seen by the attitude of individualists like Ruano Segúndez, the tide had not turned definitively against the strategy of individual 'expropriations'. There remained many individualists both in and around the anarchist movement who, it must be remembered, dissented from the new stance of the FAI because, in theoretical terms at least, they accepted no other authority than their own.

The last card of the FAI was to issue a formal threat to expel from its ranks any dissident supporters of individual 'expropriation'. Although this raised the unpleasant prospect of facing a jail term without any assistance from the Prisoners' Support Committees, on several occasions it proved necessary for Durruti to intervene to hold back anarchists from embarking on armed robberies. However, the FAI order of spring 1935 did produce a dramatic decrease in the rate of armed expropriations and by the beginning of 1936 the rate of armed robberies slowed down considerably, the majority of which appeared to be the exclusive work of desperate unemployed workers. Similarly, apart from the assassination of the executioner of Aranda, the activities of the Confederal Defence Committees and the anarchist *grupos de afinidad* also abated in the latter half of 1935.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Paz, *Durruti*, pp.311-314

<sup>61</sup> Paz, *Durruti*, p.314; *Las Noticias*, 1 January-18 July 1936; *Comercio y Navegación*, January-July 1936; Eslava, *Verdugos*, p.307; Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, p.201

#### 7.4. The Discreet Charm of the Republicans

The taming of the *grupistas* was inseparable from the bid of the CNT-FAI leadership to respond to grass-roots sentiments that favoured proletarian unity in the face of unrelenting state repression and the worsening fascist danger. While the revolutionary forces failed to make their own revolution in October 1934, the counter-revolutionary right also lacked sufficient power to destroy independent labour organisations in the same way as was achieved in Italy, Germany and Austria. The response of the united working class in Asturias was a lesson to the right, serving notice that unlike in Italy and Germany, Spanish labour was prepared to fight the march of fascism, and that unlike in Austria, it would not leave its fight too late. Moreover, in contrast to the feeble convulsions produced by the 'revolutionary gymnastics' of the anarchists, the 'Asturian Commune' unquestionably shook the economic and political élites and remained a potent symbol for proletarian unity. Under these circumstances, it did not seem unreasonable that the major protagonists of the 'Spanish October', the Workers' Alliance would be the beneficiary of the groundswell of support for unity among the working class.<sup>62</sup>

The BOC, still the most emphatic advocate of unity, championed the spirit of Asturias and implored the UGT and the CNT to commit themselves to a projected 'National Workers' Alliance' (Alianza Obrera Nacional). This was given new urgency after the announcement of elections for early 1936 and it was clear to many workers that they had to transcend the divisions of the past, because a new electoral victory for a rightist coalition headed by the CEDA carried the danger of a Hitlerian-style conquest of democracy from within. It seemed, therefore, that the case for proletarian unity was irrefutable.<sup>63</sup>

There were promising signs of a new post-Asturian unitarian spirit within the Barcelona proletariat. In the textile sector, where a violent syndical recruiting war between *bloquistas*, *cenetistas* and *treintistas* had been intermittent between 1933-1934,

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<sup>62</sup> *La Batalla*, 4 October 1934

<sup>63</sup> BOC-FCCB, *Les lliçons de la insurrecció d'octubre*, Barcelona, 1935, pp.26-27; *L'Hora*, 15 February 1935

workers of all persuasions united to block attempts by employers to reintroduce the *Sindicatos Libres* into the workplace. Yet there were definite limits to the organisational unity of the Barcelona proletariat. Despite evidence that large sectors of the grass-roots of the CNT-FAI in Catalonia favoured united working class action, the hatred of the anarchists for the Workers' Alliance had not mellowed. Moreover, the prospect of 'anarchist unity' inside the Confederation and the imminent *rapprochement* between the *faistas* and the *treintistas* was exploited by the anarchist leadership to draw attention away from its continuing sectarian attitude towards the Workers' Alliance.<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, the bulk of the working class, both in Barcelona and in Spain, recognised that the political context demanded an alliance. Increasingly, the question was, which sort of unity?

During late 1935 a new pole for anti-fascist unity emerged alongside the exclusively proletarian Workers' Alliance. This was the Popular Front (Frente Popular), a platform that effectively revived the 1931 Republican-Socialist coalition. In Catalonia, where the political context was always more radicalised than elsewhere in the Spanish state, the Popular Front was known as the 'Leftist Front' (Front d'Esquerres).<sup>65</sup> Therefore, as the February 1936 elections approached, there were two rival paths to anti-fascist unity: the exclusively proletarian Workers' Alliance, based on the 'Asturian way' of revolutionary anti-fascism, and the multi-class, electoral alliance of the Popular Front.

Despite the challenge of the Popular Front, the supporters of the Workers' Alliance were confident that both the beacon of Asturias and the memory of the anti-worker repression of 1931-1933 would hand them the initiative. However, from October 1934 onwards there was a gradual, sometimes imperceptible, enhancement of the

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<sup>64</sup> *La Batalla*, 19 January, 29 November, 6 December 1935; *Tiempos Nuevos*, 10 January 1935; *Sindicalismo*, 30 May, 7 August 1935; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 January 1936

<sup>65</sup> Santos Juliá Díaz, *Orígenes del Frente Popular en España (1934-1936)*, Madrid, 1979, *passim*; Paul Preston, 'The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain', in Helen Graham and Paul Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, London, 1987, pp.84-105; Santos Juliá Díaz, 'The Origins and Nature of the Spanish Popular Front', in Martin S. Alexander and Helen Graham (eds.), *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts. Comparative Perspectives*, Cambridge, 1989, pp.24-37. The Popular Front was known as the Front d'Esquerres in Catalonia: see Ricard Vinyes i Ribes, *La Catalunya Internacional. El frontpopulisme en l'exemple català*, Barcelona, 1983, *passim*.

popularity of Republicanism. It is difficult to explain this by reference to either the relevance or the coherence of Republican policies which, like in 1931-1933, remained very confused and ambiguous. Instead, the revived fortunes of Republicanism owed to an array of circumstantial factors, especially the persecution of the Republican leaders by the right-wing Radical-CEDA government after October 1934. To be sure, the incarceration and persecution of figures like Companys and Azaña bolstered their waning credibility to such a degree that despite the anti-revolutionary repression they had unleashed from office, many workers now saw them to be suffering alongside the proletariat. This coincidence was ably exploited by Republican propagandists who agitated around the highly emotive issue of the social and political prisoners from October 1934. There were even attempts by Republicans to appropriate the symbolism and the legacy of the Asturian Revolution.<sup>66</sup>

Most importantly of all, however, the resuscitation of the Republican option was made possible by the position of the anarchists. Considering the anti-CNT policies enacted by the Republican-Socialist government between 1931 and 1931, not to mention the repression spearheaded by the Esquerra from the Generalitat, this was highly paradoxical. Nevertheless, the contribution of the anarchists to the success of the Popular Front can be seen in numerous ways.

Most fundamentally, it was the continuing sectarian opposition of the anarchists to an exclusively proletarian and revolutionary alliance that facilitated the consolidation of the cross-class, reformist Popular Front. The persistent hostility of the libertarians towards the unity drive of the Workers' Alliance from 1933 onwards meant that the desire for revolutionary anti-fascist unity among the Catalan masses remained largely inchoate. This allowed the Popular Front strategy to grow in stature and tap the anti-fascist unitarian sentiments that remained from the 'Asturian October' and, most emotionally of all, champion the demand for the release of the prisoners.

Traditional anarchist apoliticism also played its part to the triumph of the Popular Front option over the Workers' Alliance. When it came to the February 1936 elections

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<sup>66</sup> *La Batalla*, 25 October 1935; Vinyes i Ribes, *La Catalunya Internacional*, pp.94-198

the anarchists swallowed the revolutionary bluster of the preceding years and, despite the common revolutionary objectives of the anarchists and the dissident communists, the CNT-FAI shunned the offer of an insurrectionary *entente* with the revolutionary communists because it was a 'political' alliance. Yet the pressure of events demanded a political response and, like in the April 1931 elections, the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists gravitated towards the petit-bourgeois Republican parties, whose Popular Front electoral coalition seemed more attractive than a revolutionary proletarian alliance.<sup>67</sup>

Apoliticism induced a bizarre amnesia on the libertarians that clouded the memory of the ruthless treatment they received at the hands of the Generalitat in 1934. By mid-1935, La Revista Blanca, the messenger of anarchist apoliticism, attested to the 'dignity' of Companys in much the same way as the anarchists had praised Macià four years earlier. As the elections loomed closer, it was manifest that behind the ritual denunciations of the forthcoming 'electoral farce', the anarchists were ready to break with their formal apoliticism in return for an amnesty and the reimposition of constitutional liberties under a Popular Front government. There was nothing resembling the strident anti-Republicanism and insurrectionary rhetoric that accompanied the 1933 general elections and while the CNT-FAI did not formally invite workers to vote, throughout the electoral period paragons of anarchist virtue like Durruti and Francisco Ascaso tirelessly reiterated the need for an immediate amnesty, a cry that was, in effect, an invitation to vote for the Popular Front. In the view of Peirats, this stance was 'expedient' under the circumstances. Other libertarians were even more candid. Peiró, on the eve of his return to the CNT but who was still a member of the FAI, advised those workers who normally abstained to vote 'against fascism'. Similarly, Urales, the grand sorcerer of Iberian anarchism, went a step further, warning that it would be a 'great error' for the CNT-FAI to deny votes to the Republicans. Meanwhile, relying on the same

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<sup>67</sup> La Batalla, 15 November, 27 December 1935, 24 January 1936; Santos Juliá Díaz, Orígenes, pp118-119, 207-210; Front, 7 February 1936

expression used by Ricardo Sanz to describe the April 1931 elections, Abad de Santillán later recognised that the anarchists viewed the Popular Front as a 'lesser evil'.<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, just as the Popular Front was a re-run of the Republican-Socialist coalition, like in 1931 the CNT-FAI, this time firmly under the sway of the anarchists, repeated the electoral intervention that ensured the birth of the Republic and in February 1936 *cenetista* votes ensured the victory of the Popular Front. Like in 1931 there was widespread jubilation and the new government promised it would safeguard the 'social advances of the Republic'. The jails were opened and thousands of the workers incarcerated after October 1934 were released. The Generalitat re-gained the powers that had been accorded to it under the Autonomy Statute and earlier reforms were re-implemented.

Again, just like after April 1931, the signs of the disaffection felt by Catalan workers with the new Popular Front and Generalitat governments were not slow in coming. In particular, there were renewed resentments at the failure of both the central and regional governments to cut unemployment and assist the unemployed. The CNT-FAI criticised the Popular Front for dragging its heels on its pledge to re-instate those workers victimised after October 1934. There were other complaints that the projected re-instatement of victimised workers was an affront to those CNT-FAI activists who had been sacked from 1931 onwards. In response, the Confederation embarked on a series of mobilisations to ensure that its activists were re-employed. Meanwhile, highlighting the failure of *grupismo*, it was significant that the re-admission of many of those workers victimised after the 'revolutionary gymnastics' owed to the mass syndical pressure of a rejuvenated CNT and the new political context after February 1936.<sup>69</sup>

While the Popular Front government satisfied the CNT-FAI insofar as it abided by certain basic democratic protocols that had been absent after the triumph of the right in 1933, the issue of civil liberties was a serious stumbling block between the

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<sup>68</sup> *La Revista Blanca*, 7 June 1935, 3 January 1936; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 8, 17, 24 January 1936; José Peirats, *Examen crítico-constructivo del movimiento libertario español*, Mexico, 1967, pp.26-27; 'Juanel', (Juan Manuel Molina), *Consideraciones*, p.13; *Las Noticias*, 5 February 1936; Peiró cited in Benjamin Martin, *The Agony of Modernization. Labor and Industrialization in Spain*, Ithaca, 1990, p.363; Diego Abad de Santillán, *Por qué perdimos la guerra*, Buenos Aires, 1940, p.37

<sup>69</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 February-15 July 1936



government and the Confederation. Firstly, the CNT-FAI was outraged that the Popular Front government refused to repeal the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*. To make matters worse, the utilisation of the law against the unemployed increased after February. Secondly, although the Popular Front had fulfilled its promise of an amnesty for the thousands of 'political' prisoners who had been jailed after October 1934, the amnesty did not extend to those detainees that the CNT described as 'social' prisoners. The 'social' prisoner category included many *cenetistas* and *faístas* who had been interned under the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*, as well as numerous 'expropriators' from the Confederal Defence Committees, who were serving sentences as 'common' criminals. The CNT also petitioned the authorities to extend the amnesty to include those unemployed workers who were serving jail sentences for illegally 'procuring the means of subsistence'. The CNT-FAI backed its demands with a broad campaign for the repeal of the *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*, along with the other 'repressive laws' from the first Republican biennium, like the *Ley de orden público* and for a complete amnesty of all prisoners, including those jailed for 'common crimes' and 'crimes of hunger'. The frustration of the 'common' prisoners, and the agitation of the remaining *cenetistas* and *faístas* in the jails, culminated in a wave of prison uprisings throughout Spain.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the rising agitation inside the jails, the CNT-FAI was averse to presenting the Popular Front with serious problems. It was common knowledge that the extreme right, along with disgruntled army officers were conspiring against the government. The anarchists decided to maintain an expectant attitude and not get embroiled in unnecessary confrontations with the authorities. In the spring of 1936, the CNT looked in on itself and devoted much time to the re-construction of the syndical organisations that had received such a battering by the authorities between 1931 and 1935. Equally, the Confederation prepared to welcome back the *treintistas* into the 'libertarian family' and set about organising a national congress to map out its trajectory. The months after the Popular Front victory were, therefore, largely a time of reflection for the Catalan CNT-FAI, a sharp contrast with the impetuous maximalism and

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<sup>70</sup> *Las Noticias*, 5 February, 19 May 1936; *Tierra y Libertad*, 17 April 1936; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22, 31 January, 20-22, 26 February, 3-7 March 1936; Azafía, *Obras*, vol.4, p.570

*grupismo* that characterised the earlier period of the 'revolutionary gymnastics'.<sup>71</sup> The *grupistas* were not entirely inactive, however. At the end of April a FAI *grupo de afinidad* assassinated the Badia brothers, Miquel and Josep, as they left their flat in the Eixample. After the Popular Front triumph the FAI had issued a public warning that any attempt by the Generalitat to re-appoint either of the two brothers would be resisted 'as if they were Martínez Anido and Arlegui'. However, it would be wrong to view the assassinations as a challenge to the authority of the Generalitat. Instead, the killings of the Badia brothers represented a classic example of a 'settling of scores' by the *faístas*, who were unable to forgive the brutality of the former Barcelona Police Chief. Miquel Badia had already survived one assassination attempt and he continued to receive hand-written death threats and suffer rancorous attacks in the CNT press.<sup>72</sup>

## 7.5. An 'apolitical' revolution: Anarchism, Revolution and Civil War

The assassination of the Badia brothers was the last significant action by the *grupos de afinidad* before the July *pronunciamiento* of the Spanish military against the Republican government. The military rising succeeded where the 'revolutionary gymnastics' had failed: it created the spark that lit the flame of a popular revolution and the proletariat of Barcelona rose up to quash the attempted military take-over. Inspired by 'Nosotros', the Confederal Defence Committees finally scored the triumph over the military that had been so long in coming. The extent to which the minority putsches were

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<sup>71</sup> The reduced activity of the Catalan CNT in the months immediately preceding the Civil War has led Catalan nationalist historians to talk of Catalonia as 'the oasis of peace' in the Republic. An example of this trend is Josep Benet, 'Ara fa quaranta anys. Catalunya, oasi', *Serra d'Or*, May 1976, pp.15-21. This view has rightly been criticised for relativising the degree of social conflict in Catalonia in the months preceding the Civil War, when the newly-formed POUM and its trade union federation, the FOUS, endeavoured to take the initiative in the political and syndical spheres: Vinyes i Ribes, *La Catalunya Internacional*, pp.303-335; Durgan, *Dissident Communism*, pp.298-333

<sup>72</sup> *La Publicitat*, 5 April 1934; Balius, *Octubre catalán*, pp.3-4, 14-16, 29-30; *Las Noticias*, 8, 18, 29 March, 29-30 April, 1-8, 16, 20 May 1936; FO371/20522/W5256/62/41: Letter from C.G. King, 5 June 1936 (PRO); García Oliver, *El eco*, p.580. According to the testimony of Ramón Liarte, Francisco Ascaso authorised the assassinations after Badia sent signed orders to CNT-FAI leaders to 'quit Catalonia' in 1934. Interestingly, it fell to the 'X' *grupo de afinidad*, which included the Ruano brothers, the Argentinian émigré individualists, to take revenge on 'the Catalan Göering'. When news of the deaths of the Badia brothers reached the members of 'Nosotros' in the 'Café Espanyol' on El Paral·lel, Francisco Ascaso quipped that they should attend the funeral: Liarte, *El camino*, pp.221-225. 'Nosotros' welcomed the assassinations in terms of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth': Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política*, p.248. Although he obviously did not condone the killings, Companys reflected that the brothers had 'asked for it': Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, p.259.

a suitable preparation for the street fighting in July 1936 is, however, highly debatable. Even in the anarchist stronghold of Barcelona, the important minorities of socialists and dissident communists, who were excluded from the élitist 'revolutionary gymnastics', played an important part in putting down the military rising, as did Republican and *Catalaniste* elements inside the security forces.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the CNT-FAI who emerged as the *de facto* masters of the streets of Barcelona. The anarchists set about achieving much of what they had hoped for after February. Many of the 'social prisoners' and 'common criminals' who had not been amnestied in February were finally released, including Escolano López, the anarchist highway robber sentenced to over 100 years in jail, and the Ballanos brothers, a pair of individualist 'expropriators'. Meanwhile, many of the foreign anarchists who had figured among the 'expropriators' were also released, whereupon they joined the fight against fascism in the Civil War. Others were not so lucky. Santamaría, an Argentinian friend of Abad de Santillán imprisoned in the Castillo de San Cristóbal in Pamplona as a 'common criminal', was murdered in the jail when it was taken by the military. In a grotesque act, Torres Escartin, the ex-'Los Solidarios' member, was discovered by fascists in an asylum and executed.<sup>74</sup>

The initiative held by the CNT-FAI after the July days did not remain with them for long. Although the Catalan proletariat unleashed a revolution at the base of society, reorganising production and taking over the factories, the CNT-FAI was incapable of leading the Catalan proletariat to the promised land. Among the CNT-FAI leaders, García Oliver raised the call 'to go the whole way' (*ir a por el todo*) towards social transformation, however, he was in a minority among his comrades, who saw him as an advocate of 'anarchist dictatorship'.<sup>75</sup> Instead, for the sake of unity in the war against fascism, the libertarians opted for 'democratic collaboration' with the Republicans, just as

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<sup>73</sup> Abel Paz, *19 de Juliol del '36' à Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1988, pp.69-115; Manuel Cruells, *La revolta del 1936 à Barcelona*, Barcelona, 1976, pp.155-214; Bueso, *Recuerdos*, vol.2, pp.144-195; García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.171-177

<sup>74</sup> *Treball*, 8 August 1936; Ballano was later appointed delegate for Justice and Public Order in the revolutionary Council of Aragon: Peirats, *La CNT*, vol.1, pp.211, 215; Abad de Santillán, *Memorias*, pp.220-221

<sup>75</sup> García Oliver, *El eco*, pp.177-191

they had done in April 1931 and in July 1936. Hence, while the revolution took place in many of the factories and fields of the Republican zone, the old bourgeois state continued to exist. In opting for an alliance with the middle class Republicans the anarchists ignored the proven democratic shortcomings of the Republicans over the previous five years, as well as evidence that some currents of Republican opinion in Barcelona and Madrid feared the revolutionary left far more than the mutinous army. This was reflected in the shameful attempts of those Republicans who initially hoped to accommodate themselves with the military rebels in the hope that some kind of a 'Republican dictatorship' would emerge to extinguish the revolutionary threat of the organised working class.

The logic of the post-July 1936 situation of 'dual power' was not the outcome of miscalculation or error by the libertarians; rather, true to its ancient Greek etymology, anarchism was 'against power', including that of the proletariat, the very force it proposed to liberate. In July 1936, like in April 1931 and in February 1936, the hostility of the anarchists to a 'political' alliance with the not inconsiderable forces of revolutionary socialists and dissident communists, meant that the initiative fell once more to the Esquerra. Thus, the 'dual power' of July 1936 in the Republican camp was the inexorable result of anarchist apoliticism, the immediate legacy of the obstinate rejection by the libertarians of the genuine efforts to forge revolutionary unity in the preceding years. Because the anarchists viewed politics in the same way as Christians regard original sin, there was no such thing as 'good' or 'bad' politics or, 'proletarian' or 'bourgeois' politics, there were simply 'politics', which, for the libertarians, were morally reprehensible.

The new conditions of war and revolution after July 1936 revealed the limitations of anarchism as a highly eclectic and ill-formed ideology. Moreover, even when anarchism was closely adhered to trade unionism, in the guise of anarcho-sindicalism, the struggles of the proletariat were restricted to the ideological and economic spheres. This meant that however brave or ferocious the offensive of the CNT-FAI might be, political struggles, that is to say, struggles for state power, were ignored. The CNT

unions, therefore, were an insufficient match in a social war against state power. Consequently, even though successive governments and the bourgeoisie feared the Confederal working class in the streets both during the Republic and in the Civil War, the CNT masses posed little threat on a political level, as the architects of a rival state power. In practical terms, therefore, the political impact of the profound revolutionary impulses that emanated from the Catalan working class in the 1930s was significantly muted and the CNT-FAI were capable of leading little more than sporadic guerrilla actions against the authorities, actions that were easily dealt with by the repressive state apparatuses. Meanwhile, once war took precedence over revolution, the conditions existed for the enemies of the revolution in the Republican camp to reconstruct the political power of the state and re-direct it again at the most revolutionary elements of the Catalan proletariat.

## Conclusion

In the opinion of its creators, the Republican state and its security forces were essentially neutral vessels that could be mobilised benignly to aid the people. Though the Second Republic assumed the parity of rich and poor before the law, the overall emphasis of the Republicans was on formal, not substantive equality. Hence, structural economic inequality and class discrimination remained as before. Article 1 of the Constitution highlighted the vague abstractions of the Republican mind, implying that rank and privilege would not affect the legal process and completely ignoring the material disadvantages and the daily economic compulsion that weighed down upon the working class. Indeed, while the factory owner and the unemployed worker were now formally equal in the eyes of the law, there the parity ended; economic laws forebode the former from sleeping on the streets, yet virtually compelled privations on the latter throughout the Republican years. Therefore, although formal equality before the law represented an important development after years of monarchist absolutism, it was, in practice, little more than a fig-leaf for continuing socio-economic inequality and the continuing social exclusion of large sectors of the proletariat. The Republicans apparently saw no contradiction here, nor was it felt that continuing socio-economic inequality would undermine the chances of success of the new democratic polity. Nevertheless, the view that formal equality could exist within a highly invidious socio-economic system was at best mistaken, at worst a direct subterfuge. In practice, the fiction of 'legal equality' within a society based on immense disparities of power and property meant that by reinforcing the socio-economic *status quo* Republican law became another guarantor of these very inequalities.

The coincidence between the birth of the Republic and the world economic recession meant that tremendous distance rapidly opened up between the Republicans and the poorest sectors of the working class. The limitations of the Republic were quickly revealed to thousands of workers in Barcelona, as were the definite limits to which organised labour could be integrated within the structures of the new régime. These limits narrowed considerably due to the quest for the 'Republic of Order' and the readiness of the authorities to minimise the power of the most revolutionary sectors of

the labour movement. Thereafter, relations between the CNT and the Madrid authorities turned sour when the Confederation initiated a campaign of industrial action aimed at bettering the desperate economic situation of its members, an initiative which many Republicans interpreted as a generalised offensive against the fledgling democracy. In the course of these mobilisations many workers won the 44-hour week, a triumph they regarded as a vital safeguard against growing unemployment. However, this was an innovation that the sluggish Catalan economy could not easily accept and a dialectic of conflict was established which culminated in many capitalists turning against a bourgeois democracy that always seemed incompatible with their long-standing penchant for authoritarianism, both in the factory and on the national political stage.

The hope of the Esquerra to mediate between the antagonistic classes in Catalan society and bridge the gulf between the CNT and the Madrid Republican authorities was undermined by the absence of institutional power in the hands of the *Catalanistes*. The inability of the Generalitat to act on behalf of the most downtrodden sectors of Catalan society generated fissures within 'the people', the cross-class alliance that brought the Republic. The disappointment with the reality of the Republic meant that a wave of radicalisation quickly overcame the grass-roots of the Barcelona CNT, elevating the most radical elements into the directive positions of the Confederation and promising a complete rupture with the Republic. The determination of the CNT rank-and-file to better its own material position led to spiralling clashes between Republican security forces and union defence squads. This scuppered plans for re-negotiating the legitimacy of the state and the authorities increasingly relied on hard methods of repression, some of which were inherited from the monarchy, such as internment without trial, while others, like the *Ley de Defensa de la República*, were home grown. Because it was dependent on the goodwill of the Spanish state for the promulgation of autonomous powers, the ERC was eager to prove its responsibility to Madrid and had little choice but to accept the repressive turn of the new régime.

There was, however, a fatal contradiction between the Republican discourse of 'order' and 'legality': by outlawing a mass, labour organisation and repressing the

desperate actions of the jobless to survive, the authorities paradoxically guaranteed an increase in the level of illegality. In response to the challenge to its authority, the Republican authorities increasingly accepted the repressive inhibitions previously held by their monarchical predecessors and championed the 'principle of authority'. This culminated in the law-and-order fears articulated by the Esquerra-dominated Generalitat. The obsession of the ERC with law-and-order was particularly significant. Often seen as the most radical of all the Republicans factions during the 1930s, the impact of the recession led the Esquerra to accept a reactionary social philosophy and move rightwards, culminating in the emergence of a proto-fascist faction inside the coalition. Even the 'Lluhins', the left-wing of the Esquerra, showed considerable signs of authoritarian thinking and revealed a readiness to trample on democratic protocols.

The descent into repression encouraged the continuity of long-standing anti-police traditions within the proletariat of Barcelona, popular conventions that complemented the activities of the syndical defence squads and the FAI-dominated CNT. The ascendancy of the FAI did, nevertheless, produce a series of bitter ironies. The rise of the FAI was bound up with their ability to tap the ground swell of frustration generated by unemployment. However, constructive action against joblessness required powerful unions and a united proletarian campaign for the re-incorporation of the out-of-work in the factories. *Faísmo* was inimical to the project of creating a credible campaign against unemployment; it brought nothing but weakness and division to the CNT and the labour movement as a whole, as the anarchists doggedly rejected united front initiatives against unemployment. Any balance of the labour of the anarchists in the 1930s cannot ignore the nefarious and negative consequences *faísmo* brought to the Catalan CNT, particularly its rabid sectarianism and its bloody organisational rivalries with *bloquistas*, *treintistas* and *uguetistas*. Devastated by splits and repeated crises by 1936 the Catalan CNT lost about half of the 300,000 members it claimed in June 1931. However, as seen by its phoenix-like revival between 1930-1931, the CNT had emerged from worse crises in the past, and in May 1936 the Confederation still accounted for about 50% of all trade unionists in Catalonia, with around 180,000 members after the re-



unification with the *treintistas*. Nevertheless, the absurd revolutionary and sectarian line of the anarchists alienated thousands of generally better-off, more stable and semi-skilled workers from the CNT, stimulating the emergence of new syndical options within the Catalan proletariat. Thus, by 1936 the dissident communist-led unions who germinated into the FOUS, organised many of the syndical struggles in Catalonia before the Civil War, where they claimed 60,000 members.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, there is a case for arguing that the Catalan UGT was the main beneficiary of anarchist maximalism, attracting 18,000 new affiliates from the *treintistas* of Sabadell and Manresa who chose not to return to the CNT and the 23,000 strong CADCI. This anti-anarchist feeling transformed the Catalan UGT from a 'man-and-a-dog' union in 1931 to an organisation which claimed 100,000 members on the eve of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

The allure of the better-skilled, often non-immigrant workers, for dissident communism or socialism should not be taken as confirmation that the anarchists were based on an essentially immigrant 'underclass'. The superficial correlation between anarchism and immigration masks the underlying reality that the inherently fragile industrial structure of Barcelona lent itself to aggressive and explosive conflicts which, to a large extent, suited anarchist methods. It is also far from certain whether it is licit to speak of the existence of an 'underclass' in the 1930s. To be sure, many of those deemed 'underclass' were nothing more than hyper-exploited, unskilled or unemployed proletarians. Equally, many of those dubbed 'underworld' by the hack sociologists of the daily press, were proponents of 'occasional criminality' from the large and growing pockets of seasonal, unskilled and poor workers who saw the need to transgress laws to meet their most fundamental needs during the recession-torn 1930s. The myth that these jobless workers were part of an immoral and dangerous 'underclass' was a vital part of the campaign of the Republican authorities to divide the working class and criminalise the unemployed who had flooded into the CNT.

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<sup>1</sup> *Front*, 5 June 1936; *La Batalla*, 15, 22 May, 15, 26 June 1936; Durgan, *Dissident Communism*, pp.298-323. With the outbreak of Civil War the FOUS hesitantly joined the UGT, to avoid marginalisation.

<sup>2</sup> *Justicia Social-October*, 17 July 1936. Gabriel Sirvent puts the Catalan UGT strength at 86,000 for the same period ('Sindicalismo y sindicatos socialistas', p.64)

Despite their part in securing the ascendancy of the *faistas*, in many ways the jobless inside the Confederation were ignored and left unorganised, largely used as cannon-fodder for the 'revolutionary spasms' of the 'insurrectionary pendulum movements' and the 'propaganda of the hungry' of the 'self-help' expropriations. Leaving the jobless in a state of relative abandon was not without its dangers and on more than one occasion the dissident communists warned that the anarchists that while 'hunger makes revolutionaries, it also makes traitors'.<sup>3</sup> However, unlike in Germany or Italy, the powerful revolutionary traditions in Catalonia meant that the out-of-work did not join a mass, radicalised party of the far right. Instead, the unemployed were drawn to what Ricard Vinyes i Ribes termed the 'brilliant subversive culture' of the CNT, finding a place within the essentially self-sufficient, proletarian counter-society, a cultural universe which united sections of the Catalan proletariat with marginal elements normally shunned by other established political groups, including many of those on the left.<sup>4</sup> The coming together of this revolutionary culture with the culture of hunger and privation of large sections of the Catalan masses helps explain the way in which the anarchists, far more than any other current within the labour movement, articulated the aspirations of the unskilled and the unemployed and, as revealed by the expropriations, took the struggles of these sectors outside the parameters of collective mobilisation. This readiness to vent the urges, both creative and destructive, of the most downtrodden sections of the Catalan masses, helps explain the durability and lasting appeal of the CNT-FAI in the 1930s.

The strengths of the rebel culture of the CNT must, however, be juxtaposed with the debilitating logic of apoliticism. This aversion to politics of all creeds periodically emasculated the numerically huge Catalan working class and reduced it to political impotency. Consequently, the political representatives of the Catalan working class were absent from both the Generalitat and local councils during the Republic. While the anarchists were correct that these institutions were not capable of ushering in any

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<sup>3</sup> *La Batalla*, 6 April, 5 May 1933

<sup>4</sup> Ricard Vinyes i Ribes, *La Presència Ignorada. La Cultura Comunista a Catalunya (1840-1931)*, Barcelona, 1989, p.201

profound long-term transformation of society, they could, nevertheless, have become platforms for genuine proletarian politics. For instance, the Municipal Council Chambers of proletarian Barcelona were a contestable political space which, if conquered, might have been utilised to plough vital financial resources into the depressed working class ghettos, thereby aiding the unemployed and enhancing the pitiful levels of housing and sanitation, just as occurred in Vienna before the victory of fascism in 1934.

In accordance with the apolitical lodestar that guided anarchist praxis, the CNT underwent a series of swings during the five years of the Republic, oscillating from moderation to maximalism, before swinging back to a cautious stance in 1936. Apoliticism rendered the enormous power of this mass movement impotent at the most critical (political) moments. On these occasions the anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists inadvertently favoured exogenous political forces: the petit bourgeois Republicans in April 1931 and the reactionary-monarchical right in November 1933, before aiding the bourgeois-democrats once more in February and July 1936. Years later a Catalan anarchist from this period painfully reflected that because there was not a 'fixed position binding for every situation', the apoliticism of the CNT-FAI became 'an opportunistic tactic'.<sup>5</sup>

Centuries earlier, with the balance of forces openly in his favour, Spartacus renounced the opportunity to lead his slave army north into the centre of the oppressive political power of the Roman Empire, hoping instead to flee Italy for a free haven beyond the grasp of the repressive Roman state. By failing to besiege the nerve-centre of the state, Spartacus allowed the beleaguered military forces of the Roman Empire to regroup and launch a final brutal offensive against his slave army of liberation. Despite their success in forging an enduring spirit of rebellion, the Catalan anarchists followed the example of Spartacus by eschewing a frontal challenge to the state in July 1936. It was this tactical error by the libertarians that provided an opportunity for their enemies to prepare a counter-offensive which prevented them from reaching their own 'City of Sun'.

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<sup>5</sup> José Peirats, Examen, pp.26-27

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